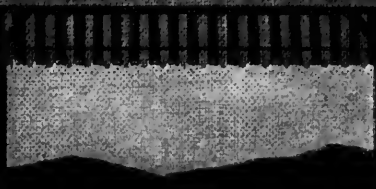


THE PARSONAGE PORCH



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THE PARSONAGE PORCH



THE
PARSONAGE PORCH

Seven Stories from a Clergyman's
Note-Book.

BY
BRADLEY GILMAN.

"Depend upon it, you would gain unspeakably if you would learn with me to see some of the poetry and the pathos, the tragedy and the comedy, lying in the experience of a human soul that looks out through dull gray eyes, and that speaks in a voice of quite ordinary tones." — GEORGE ELIOT.

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To my Friends

IN THE

PARISHES OF BELMONT, CONCORD, AND SPRINGFIELD,

TO YOUNG AND OLD, WHOSE LIVES I

HAVE SHARED, IN SUNSHINE AND

IN SHADOW,

I DEDICATE THIS LITTLE BOOK.

AS BETWEEN FRIENDS.

The observant minister, who studies himself candidly and his people sympathetically, passes through many experiences which do not find a fitting channel of expression in the pulpit. They are leaves from the wonderful book of human nature, but they are not susceptible of homiletical treatment ; and they lend themselves invitingly and often almost irresistibly to treatment in fiction. This is the explanation of the stories here presented. Like the human life with which they deal, they are set in various keys, grave and gay.

If you ask, "Are they true? Did they really happen?" I reply that they did not really happen, but they are true ; they are not a record of facts, and you may look through them in vain, seeking familiar names and places ; but whether seen in the trustful eyes of a dog, as was one, or suggested by a quaint show-window, as was

another, they all are true to life, all are the record of thoughts and feelings present in most human hearts.

I like to think, dear kindly friends, that as they pass under your eye, you will read with sympathy, and will recognize, in new form, the same ideals of faith in God and man which, in other days, by voice and pen, I held before you.

BRADLEY GILMAN.

UNITY PARSONAGE,

SPRINGFIELD, MASS., Jan. 18, 1900.

NOTE.

THE author takes pleasure in acknowledging the kindness of "Scribner's" and "Harper's" magazines, and the "New York Evening Post," in allowing him to here reprint material which first appeared in their pages.



CONTENTS.

	PAGE
I. A MISUNDERSTOOD DOG	1
II. MY OLD SILK HAT	39
III. A FRANKENSTEIN FAMILY	75
IV. HERE ENDETH THE FIRST LESSON . .	105
V. WILLIS THE DREAMER	149
VI. WANTED — A YOUNG MINISTER . . .	182
VII. THE RIVAL UNDERTAKERS	219

THE PARSONAGE PORCH.

I.

I SIT, often, upon the parsonage porch, with my books and papers. I love to sit there, for its southerly exposure is suited to my thinned blood in these latter days. And then, as I read of the world's doings, and become troubled by the thought of sins and sinners, I raise my eyes to the old church, near at hand — my old church, mine to grow old beside, twined with ivy and with tender memories — I look up from the world's record of hate and lust and craft, and the dear old church softens my mood; and I breathe a prayer, not only in behalf of the oppressed, but of the oppressor also: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

From my quiet retreat, on the vine-sheltered porch, I have not only a good view of

the hill-road, our main thoroughfare, but I can also overlook the larger part of my garden. And often Michael, white-haired old Michael, can take directions from me, by a sign or two, without coming up the lawn to the porch.

A MISUNDERSTOOD DOG.

"Art thou a dumb, wronged thing, that would be righted, entrusting thus thy cause to me?"

ROBERT BROWNING.



OUR old Michael! There he is, now, coaxing the tendrils of a trumpet-flower up over the stump of an old cherry-tree. The bent, decrepit figure of the man brings back the past to me. I recall, as if it were yesterday, a morning like this, twenty years ago, when I sat, as I do now, on the porch, and a man opened the garden-gate, hesitated, entered, and came shambling up the path. As he drew near, I saw, by his faded, shapeless hat, his gray, collarless shirt, his torn and soiled

coat, and his trousers worn and baggy, and fringed at the bottoms, that he was a tramp. With him was a dog, a brindled bull-dog, having a patch of white around one eye, with ears looking like pennants frayed out by many storms, and a short stump of a tail, so animated, that it seemed a thing of life, quite apart from the animal himself. The dog had a self-reliant, even aggressive air, which led me — although I love dogs most devotedly — to glance for reassurance at the open door behind me.

As the two soiled, disreputable wanderers came near, both recognized my presence, and both lost their gloomy aspect, and hopefully smiled. The dog's smile was the more marked of the two, but it was a real smile — if one knows dogs — and quite restored my confidence. His mouth opened, his tongue lolled out, his ragged ears pointed forward like shattered interrogation points, he tossed his head back, and quickened, from a sober and even dignified walk, to a trot, which had a sad suggestion of forced gayety in it. Pres-

ently the man stood before me, hat in hand, and humbly addressed me.

“Only a little bread and coffee, this bright morning, Yer Riverence!”

Then he turned sharply upon the dog, who was snuffing at my knees: “Down, Satan! Set down thar!” And the dog obeyed.

I have many kinds of titles bestowed upon me by strange visitors. The book agents and insurance agents, knowing the weaknesses and ambitions of the ministry, usually call me “Doctor.” The forlorn people with letters of recommendation often say “Your Honor;” the Celtic portion of my visitors use the title “Yer Riverence;” and sometimes a German addresses me tersely as “Reverend.” In this case it was “Yer Riverence.”

I looked at the man, and felt sure I had seen him before, for I recall faces easily; a minister must do that. As I caught his wandering glance, it was as when one knocks and knocks, at a door, and sees a window curtain flutter, and hears a subdued step in the hall, but gets no answer to his summons. I could

look *at* his eyes, but could not look *into* them.

Now it was different with the dog. His soul came cordially out into his eyes, as into a portico, to bid me welcome; and, as I glanced at him, a grateful, tentative tremor began at his ragged ear-tips, spread over his rough, dirty body, and disappeared at the tip of his stiff, stumpy tail.

I looked at the man again, and asked, "My man, have n't I seen you here before?"

He frowned for an instant. He was debating whether I was fixed and confident in my suspicion.

Then he decided that I was; and, drawing nearer, he said, with a persuasive smile, and in a very confidential tone, "I'll tell yer, Yer Riverence; I was here only wanst before; three months ago, about; yer'll belave me, now, Yer Riverence, fer it's hiven's truth I'm tillin' yer; and yer'll not mind me comin' this mornin', for Satan and me is 'most starved."

Satan corroborated this speech — which I am sure he understood — by a subdued whine,

and a most intelligent and pleading look into my face.

For a moment I was puzzled as to my duty. The fellow was plainly a shiftless vagabond. His habits of life were recorded not only on his garments but in his face. Yet he had thrown himself on my confidence and sympathy; and then—I must confess it—as I glanced at the dog, looking up trustfully into the face of his human master, as a hungry soul might look up toward his God, the scene touched me; my heart softened; and, for the dumb brute's sake, I bade his master stay. I entered the house, and brought out bread and meat and coffee.

Then the better side of the man's character showed itself; as I had expected, he shared the food with his dog. That hungry dependant stood with bright, eager eyes looking up at his master, and his long, red tongue flicked alternately out and in, at the sides of his mouth, as if he were sharpening it for instant use; and, all the time, little thrills and chills coursed down along his body like ripples on a lake.

“Yours?” I asked; “your dog?”

“You bet, Yer Riverence! begging your pardon for the word.” Here one greasy finger shot upward in apology toward his rimless hat. “He’s mine; all mine, every hair of him.”

“I hope you’re kind to him,” I ventured; for I had my doubts, as I detected the fellow’s unstable character; I thought he might be one of those lovers of dogs who heap kindness on a pet, in one tender mood, and then abuse him cruelly, in a fit of temper.

“Yes, I’m — I’m kind to Satan;” and his vacillating glance rested with real tenderness on the dog. “That is — most of the time; once in a while, though, Yer Riverence, I lose me timper a bit, and thin — thin — I — I — well — Satan, we know all about it, boy, don’t we? And we don’t bear no ill-feeling, as between pals, do we?”

The faithful dog responded with violent tail-waggings, and with subdued little growls of affection, and the tramp broke off a large piece of bread and gave it to him.

I was now interested enough in the singu-

lar pair of friends to draw the man out ; and his account of the dog — with my own interpretation of it — I have deemed myself justified in giving to the public.

As the man talked, clumsily mixing his food and his words, the fact became clearer and clearer to me, that from the first Satan had been a greatly misunderstood dog.

To begin with, there was his evil name. That had been given him, when a tiny puppy, merely because the words had figured on a lurid play-bill, and had caught the eye of the hostler, his first owner.

Also his appearance was much against him ; for his right eye was encircled by a patch of white hair, and contrasted sharply with the dark brindle color of the remainder of his body. Anybody who took pains to look at the eye itself — large, full, earnest, even pleading — could have read the animal's honest character at once ; but most people noticed only the general evil effect of the white patch.

Moreover, an imperfect growth of the upper

lip showed two of his white, glistening teeth ; and they also gave the appearance of ill-temper ; so that, although the puppy was actually the gentlest and most intelligent of creatures, his threatening appearance seemed to give reasons for his ominous name.

Satan was the strongest and most active of his large family ; and, as he always came off victor in their frolics, he was looked upon with approval by the idlers of the stable, and was considered a promising young fighter.

When he was about six months old, he had some difficulty with the cutting of his teeth ; one or two of them did not come through the gums easily ; and, for a week or more, he tried to help the operation by biting at everything he could get into his mouth. This passing habit also told in favor of the young dog's supposedly ferocious tendencies ; and, although poor Satan loved anybody who would give him a gentle touch of the hand, he was looked upon distrustfully ; and, in the opinion of the excellent judges around him, he was destined for a successful career in the pit.

Presently there came a change in the dog's fortunes. His owner fell ill, and was sent to the hospital ; and Satan, and all his brothers and sisters, were given away. They were not of the proper purity of breed to have any especial value — as fashions in dogs go — and were given to anybody who would take them. Satan was transferred to the ownership of an expressman, and by him was sold to a house-painter, who desired him as a playmate for his children. The enterprising expressman had prepared himself to praise the dog's fighting tendencies ; but, finding that gentler qualities were demanded, he quickly assured the purchaser that the dog was extremely docile and of a most kindly temper, thus speaking truer words than he knew ; when the trade was completed, he chuckled much at his shrewdness ; but the recording angel, I doubt not, set down against him his words of truth, as words of falsehood.

In his new home with the house-painter's family, honest, loving Satan was very happy for several months. In an hour he and the

little ones learned about one another, as well as though they had been friends for years. With the baby he was especially intimate; and the two had undoubtedly a language in common, and exchanged confidences of which older heads knew nothing.

If the children and their beloved playmate could have been left undisturbed, Satan would have got on, without suffering under any misunderstandings; but the older and so-called "wiser" people of the family, influenced by the peculiar marking of his eye, and by his exposed teeth, shook their heads at his eager, animated ways, and suggested evil tendencies in his character. This judgment gained strength, from a certain honest boldness of curiosity, which the dog evinced toward all new things; and often this inquiring nature, joined with his forbidding appearance, gave him an air of courting danger and conflict. For example, a cat was one day dropped upon the ground, near him, by a mischievous boy; Satan stared a moment at the frightened, spitting creature, then walked confidently

forward, to learn more about the strange object; and then, as the cat excitedly ran away, he caught the excitement, and ran blindly after her. This was at once set down as still clearer evidence of a deeply pugnacious character.

When Satan was eight or ten months old, another unlucky incident served to deepen the popular conviction, as to his savage temper. The butcher's boy one day held a piece of meat down to him; and, as Satan tried to take it, the boy drew it quickly away. This was repeated several times; and then Satan, in a frantic leap after the coveted morsel, seized not only the piece of meat, but by accident seized the boy's finger with it; and the boy roared with surprise and pain, and with rage against the dog.

The injury was very slight, indeed, but the boy told his employer that Satan had savagely bitten his finger. The employer told a customer to beware of that dog, for the beast had torn his servant boy's hand most savagely. The customer reported to several people that

Satan was a very ferocious animal, who had attacked several people and had endangered their lives, and that he ought to be killed.

Thus the story spread rapidly, and gained in dreadful details at each step. And, through it all, poor, maligned Satan went on romping with his playmates, and exchanging confidences with the baby, who pulled his ears more and more vigorously each day, with her increasing strength.

The baby was Satan's favorite. She was not yet strong enough or heavy enough to cause him pain, as she rolled upon him and stepped on his toes and pulled his tail. Then, too, she was not yet sufficiently ingenious to blow in his eyes and tie strings around his jaws. These were the pranks of the older children ; but Satan was patient under it all, and hoped it was for his good somehow, he knew not quite in what way.

In due time the excitement about the butcher boy died out, without bringing harm to Satan in body, but it gave him pain of heart to have threats hurled at him by people

who little knew how deeply he regretted the accident. He felt somewhat shut off from the public sympathy ; he felt a coldness in the attitude of people about him ; he grew a little shy and reserved in manner, and this was promptly set down as surliness. So that the baby, to whom he now gave even more attention and devotion, was the only confidant he had, and with her he talked this matter over fully, when they were alone ; and this was his great comfort.

One day Satan was washing the baby's face ; yes, washing her face ; he had often seen his mistress do it, and now he tried it himself. The baby was seated in the path outside the front gate, and was cooing and crowing and spluttering with delight during the process. To be sure, there was a little trace of molasses on the left cheek, and a flavor of butter down near the left corner of the mouth ; and these added temporary sensations of pleasure to Satan's constant, unswerving feelings of affection and devotion.

Just then there came by one of those

women who know everything. She knew everything about homes, and children, and dogs, and horses, and the cattle upon the thousand hills ; and knew it always in an instant. As soon, therefore, as her omniscient eye fell upon the scene, she knew that this bloodthirsty animal was trying to eat the child alive ; and, with a scream, she swooped down upon them, to the great surprise and perplexity of Satan, and the alarm and noisy resistance of the baby. She caught up the child in her arms, and the child filled the air with cries of protest ; these cries Satan understood to be an appeal to him for protection ; and the next moment, with an angry growl, he had the woman's elbow in his strong jaws, and hung there, swinging from side to side like a pendulum.

This conduct on his part, you may be assured, did not result in any lessening of the din. The omniscient woman, in that brief moment, realized her limitations more completely than ever before in her life. She screamed in fear and desperation ; and only

the timely appearance, in the doorway, of Satan's mistress saved her from fainting.

A sharp word from the doorway caused Satan to drop to the ground, with a feeling of relief at being freed from the responsibility of the child's protection; and the baby herself was soon on her mother's arm, and eager to be put down again with Satan, to continue their play, so rudely interrupted.

The omniscient woman recovered her breath and her voice, and declared violently against the ferocious dog, who "had attacked her," as she said — and as thousands of others, with as little ground of truth, have said — "without the slightest provocation." One or two of the neighbors heard the disturbance, and listened to the charges made against Satan; and here, again, the misunderstandings of the past served to support the accusations of the present; and the result of it all was that poor Satan was voted a dangerous animal, and several were heard to intimate that he would be better killed or sent away.

This episode led the way to a great transi-

tion in the dog's life. The angry demands of the neighbors were yielded to, and Satan was thrust forth from his home ; he was given to a street huckster, and by him was tied to the tail of a cart, and dragged away ; away from his home, away from his playmates the children, and away from his bosom friend, the baby.

Only force could have done it ; and that would hardly have availed, had it not been for the commands of his mistress, whose word had always been law to him. So behind the cart he was tied, and a group of weeping children was left standing at the gate, and poor, loving, loyal Satan, himself weeping, I doubt not, trotted away in the gathering gloom of that eventful evening.

His new master took him to his home, in a neighboring town, tied him in a shed, and fed him regularly for several days. This was done, as the man sagely explained to a friend, in order to gain the dog's affections ; but it gained nothing of Satan's affection. What the poor, lonely fellow needed, even

more than food, was a soft, kind word or two, and a gentle pat on the head ; to that he would have responded with eagerness ; but he did not receive it, and he ate his pieces of bread and meat in solitude and sadness, and thought of his old home.

As much as possible he slept ; for in his dreams he romped again with the children ; and sometimes, as he awoke, he could feel the baby's hand on his head ; and, looking up for one passing moment, vainly expected to see her chubby face at his side.

Here, under these new conditions, poor, unhappy Satan was continuously misunderstood. His listlessness and melancholy were taken by his master to mean surliness ; and when, after being tied up a few days, he was set free, and made no attempt to find his old home, this was considered an evidence of his stupidity.

Little did his master know that he could have found the way back, as easily as he could have crossed the road or leaped the stone wall. But he made no attempt ; he recalled

the stern command of his mistress ; he knew, as well as did anybody, that he must give up his old life, and he was reconciling himself, as best he could, to the new one. But how he did long, sometimes, for the old faces and the old voices ! In his sadness you would have hardly recognized him as the active, eager, bright-eyed Satan of the old time.

Satan's master was somewhat disappointed in him. The dog did not show any signs of that ferocity which he had been led to expect ; yet his appearance was savage enough to make him an excellent guardian of his master's house and property. And that was the irony of the situation, that the huckster's neighbors gave Satan a wide berth, and even admired, at a distance, his threatening aspect ; while he, poor fellow, looked wistfully at them, and felt weary of life, so much he longed for sympathy and affection.

Satan's stay with his master was brief. The huckster, in a few weeks, sold out his business and left town ; and since the dog had cost him nothing, and he had no affection

for the animal, he left him behind, homeless and forsaken.

Satan was now without any human ties whatever; and to be without such helps to upright conduct is as dangerous for dogs as for men; at such times the steps downward to disreputable ways are very easily entered upon. Vice beckons most persuasively when virtuous influences are absent; and a living, hoping, loving soul, whether in a man's body or in a dog's, must have companionship and sympathy as a safeguard.

So it came about that Satan made friends of various degenerate specimens of doghood; rather, he allowed them to make friends of him; and together they foraged in alleys and backyards, and led a precarious existence in the lower streets of the town. Often he thought of his old home, with its merry group of playmates; and gladly and quickly would he have sped across the country to its shelter and its love, had he not recollected, with sadness and pain, the sharp words of dismissal which had sent him forth.

So he shut his great grief within his breast, and tried to find some new friend among the crowds of the street ; but although each day he hoped for some passer-by to give him a friendly word, yet each day the hope grew more dim. Harsh words and unkind looks were his portion ; and, as the cold weather came, food, even of the worst kind, became scarcer and scarcer, and poor Satan knew, for the first time in his life, what real, gnawing hunger was like.

One day he was searching, among the refuse barrels and waste heaps of a vacant lot, for some scrap of food. He was searching in desperation. Suddenly he caught sight of a few morsels of meat, as they were thrown out into the lot from the rear door of a restaurant ; in an instant he leaped forward ; in those morsels there was a respite from starvation, for some poor four-footed creature. Satan sprang toward the food, seized it, and was about to carry it away, when he heard a savage growl behind him, and turned, barely in time to avoid the spring of another larger dog,

who also had set eyes of hungry intent on the coveted meal. Then came a louder and more threatening growl from the larger dog, as he recovered himself and made straight at Satan's throat. There was no time for reflection; Satan had no desire to fight, but here was an unjust attack. The scraps of meat belonged to him, by all laws of prior seizure; yet this larger dog, trusting to his superior strength, was bent upon taking them from him. For a moment, only, Satan reflected and hesitated; he must have what belonged to him, if, indeed, he could keep it, which seemed unlikely.

The big, hungry dog again sprang forward, and Satan dropped his morsel and met him with open mouth. The greater weight of the would-be robber rolled Satan over upon his back; but, by a lucky snap of his strong jaws, as he rolled, he seized the other dog firmly by the throat. There he hung. The big dog growled, and swept him from side to side over the ground, raising a cloud of dust; and then, lifting him fairly from the earth, shook him savagely in the air; but, all the time,

Satan, by the instinct of self-preservation, more than by any definite plan of battle, held silently by his throat, and resolved that there he would stick.

Of course the noise and the sight of the struggle drew idle spectators, like flies, to the scene. Some of them expressed delight, and others horror ; but all showed profound interest in the proceedings. Satan had his eyes shut, and could not see them, but he heard them, and he hoped each minute that somebody would interfere. He dared not let go his grip, for he knew that the big dog had strength and weight enough to kill him, if it were once brought to bear fully upon him.

But the big dog was now the more frightened of the two ; and his growls had become subdued to a whine, and his efforts became less and less vigorous. Presently a big blacksmith mustered courage to seize Satan, and a stout wagoner ventured to clutch the other dog ; and, as soon as Satan saw that his foe was likely to be held back, he loosened his jaws and gladly retreated from the struggle.

The big dog was in no condition of mind or body to renew his attack, and slunk away ; Satan, hardly less frightened, yet pressed by hunger, at once bethought himself of the scraps of meat, and quickly took possession of them, his hunger soon banishing his fright. The crowd of idlers, some of whom had seen him before, were unanimous in his praise ; they had not the words to fully express their satisfaction at the "gameness" of "the little un." His feelings of fright and his instinct of desperate self-preservation they interpreted as an innate love of bloodthirsty strife ; and they one and all agreed that such pluck had not been seen in that town, since the remarkable day when "Bill Ricketts' terrier choked the life out of Sam Baker's red setter."

This episode in Satan's life brought him into the ownership of a new master ; and the new master was no other than the tramp who presented himself, with the dog beside him, at the parsonage porch. It happened in this wise :

After the conflict was over, most of the

idlers lounged back to their haunts around the stables and saloons. But one of them went over near Satan, as he enjoyed his hardly earned meal, and talked to him in a friendlier tone than the lonely dog had heard for many a day. It may be that the two glasses of whiskey which had very recently passed down the man's throat had something to do with this friendly expression ; but, whatever the cause, the kind words were very grateful to Satan. And he even paused, half-famished as he was, to return the friendly advances, with a brief, spasmodic vibration of his tail.

When the food had been eaten, a slice of buttered bread from the rear pocket of his visitor's greasy frock-coat completed the mutual confidences ; and Satan licked the hand that patted him, and gave several snuffles and sighs of deep content, and felt that perhaps the world was not so cold and heartless as he had supposed.

The dog's history, from this point on, was told me by various police officers, and it runs as follows :

This man, Satan's next master, was drunken and disreputable enough to dampen the enthusiasm of even the most zealous "slum-worker." He was a tailor by trade, and had given up regular work long before, having learned (that most dangerous and demoralizing fact) that in this country a man can obtain bread without working for it. He had, withal, a certain attractive good-nature, which, with his ready tongue, made it especially easy for him to cajole thrifty householders out of the desired bread and coffee.

So the two faced the world together; whatever food the tailor got by his persuasive ways he shared with his dog; and the two became devoted friends. Satan was at first puzzled by the long periods of rest and profound sleep in which his master indulged, on occasions, at the most unexpected times, and in the most uncomfortable corners of public parks and alleys; indeed, he never fully understood the reason for them; but he learned to stand guard at such times over the prostrate form; and, as the police told me, woe to

the man — brass buttons or no brass buttons — who then tried to lay hand on the drunken tailor.

Thus weeks and months passed by, and Satan's life was not an unhappy one. He grew more and more dirty and unkempt; but the dog had what he most longed for, affection. The one redeeming virtue in the disreputable tailor was that he really loved Satan. Other better-kept dogs looked scornfully at him, but he only glanced up confidently at his master, and trotted along with great content in his heart.

When the tailor was sober, he was kindly; and when he was quite filled with liquor, he was soon stupid and helpless. It was when he had drunk a little only, and desired more, that he was inconsiderate and cross. At such times he was inclined to speak sharply to his faithful companion, and often tried to urge him into quarrels with other dogs; but he urged in vain — Satan had only good-will toward both man and beast. He could not understand why he should attack any crea-

ture who had not attacked him. Thus the tailor was somewhat puzzled, and was considerably disappointed in him; for he had witnessed the dog's remarkable prowess, and felt sure that he was a wonderful fighter.

Early in the afternoon of the day when the two had stood on the parsonage porch, a great thirst for liquor came over the man; and the one glass of whiskey which he was able to beg from an old crony only whetted his appetite and made him cross. He spoke sharply to Satan, and once even tried to kick him.

Then an evil combination of circumstances gathered about the two companions. The owner of a bar-room, where the thirsty tailor was lounging, hoping for a "treat," had recently bought a dog; and he offered to bet Satan's master that his new dog could whip Satan in a fair fight.

The tailor declared (in the high hope of unlimited drinks) that he could not; and several of the bystanders supported his declaration, and dropped sundry remarks in praise of Satan's prowess. The result was that an

agreement was then and there made, to set the dogs at each other, and have a trial of their respective merits.

When the new dog was brought out, he proved to be nearly a third larger than Satan, and much heavier; and the scars on his breast and shoulders showed that he was no stranger to the dog-pit. The tailor was just enough excited by the whiskey already within him, and stimulated by the hope of the larger quantity which he hoped to add to it, to be blind to the impending danger.

As for Satan, as soon as he saw the other dog, he wagged his stump of a tail, in the friendliest possible way, and would have entered at once upon a frolic; but a restraining hand held him, and the new dog uttered a forbidding growl. After a few more drinks, the crowd adjourned to a yard in the rear of an empty house, and disposed themselves on barrels and boxes and on the fence. Then the dogs were brought near each other, poor Satan wondering what it all meant, and looking for an explanation.

A practised hand now pushed the animals roughly up against each other, and although Satan only took this to be an accident, and hoped it would not be repeated, the trained pit-dog knew it, of old, as the signal for conflict, and broke from the hand that held him, and flew at his antagonist.

Now it must not be understood that Satan was a coward, for he was not; and when this ferocious animal sprang at him, great as the odds were against him, he defended himself. He was not as heavy as the pit-dog, but he was quicker; like a flash he leaped aside, and, as the other passed him, he seized him by the throat.

The pit-dog, thus impeded in his leap, rolled headlong upon the ground, and Satan fell with him. At once, from the barrels and boxes and the fence, went up a chorus of yells, at this masterly defence. All expressed great confidence in Satan's powers, heavy as the odds were against him.

The next instant, Satan felt the powerful jaws of his enemy shut into the side of his

neck. His own hold prevented those jaws from quite reaching under his throat, but the strong, sharp teeth brought pain, and blood flowed from both dogs.

For a few moments there was a pause. On the part of the trained pit-dog this was only a feint; on Satan's part it was in the hope that this was the end of the matter, and that now kind human hands would stop the savage struggle. But the half-drunken tailor only shouted to his dog, urging him on; and no help came.

Suddenly the pit-dog let go his grip, and, by his greater strength, bent his head forward and seized poor Satan's right paw in his strong jaws. Instantly there was heard a cracking sound. The bone was broken like a pipe-stem. That was the method of warfare to which he had been trained, by savage human instructors.

Satan felt the horrible pain shoot through his whole body; and his own slenderer jaws shut more desperately on his foe's tough throat. But what could the poor fellow do,

thus maimed and weakened? He could only hold on, in a frantic, hopeless way, while his drunken master loudly cursed him, and declared that he would yet conquer.

But not so. He was not a fighter, either by nature or training; his reputation for ferocity was not justified by his instincts or by his past actions. And while the pit-dog, hardy, savage, relentless, felt only irritation at the grip upon his throat, Satan's strength and courage were fast ebbing.

There was another violent struggle, confused and blood-curdling; then the pit-dog tore himself from Satan's weakened grip, his blood flowing freely, but his strength unimpaired, and his savage nature roused to fury. One quick movement, and he had Satan by the throat and shook him like a rat.

A deathly silence fell on the crowd; those who were at all sober saw that the smaller dog was doomed. The drunken tailor fairly foamed, in his obstinate wrath at his unhappy dog. His drunken madness swallowed

up the affection which he really had for his four-footed companion. Poor, desperate, dying Satan looked pleadingly, piteously at him, but that look of entreaty met no response. The brute instincts of his master had supplanted the human sympathies.

A sickening scene ensued, as the maddened pit-dog shook his helpless antagonist, and set his jaws more firmly in the unresisting throat. Deeper and deeper he thrust his glistening teeth, now dyed red with the blood of his victim, until finally there came a great gush of the red stream of life, and he crouched like a tiger over the quivering body, and the struggle was ended.

Poor Satan, misunderstood through all his life, would be misunderstood no longer.

The crowd of idle, brutal loafers, following the instincts which always govern such natures, deserted the scene, and, in a shambling, shamefaced way, straggled, in twos and threes, back to the saloons and stables.

The bar-keeper, with great difficulty, pulled his maddened animal away from the unre-

sisting body ; and the tailor, now deserted, and partially sobered by the dreadful scene, stood fixed in a stupid, frightened stare. He remained thus, several minutes, as if expecting the inanimate form to rise and come toward him, as of old. Then he spoke, weakly, hesitatingly : "Satan ! Satan ! come — here !"

But there was no response. Faithful Satan gave no sign of recognition ; the stumpy tail and the ragged ears, always so expressive of their owner's hopes and fears and sympathies, now gave no token of life and intelligence.

The wretched tailor started forward ; he leaned over his faithful companion's body ; he gazed into the half-closed eyes ; but no soulful, eloquent glance, as of old, now met him. He laid his trembling hand on the discolored body, and it grew colder and colder under his touch.

Then, for the first time, the truth seemed to penetrate his drink-obscured mind. The full extent of his loss came over his brutish nature. He groaned aloud ; he looked about him ; but his careless, selfish companions were

gone ; he knew that he was alone in the world ; his one faithful friend was dead.

Then he took off his coat, and laid the lifeless body upon it ; and, gathering the disordered bundle into his arms, he walked — with weak, trembling steps, though not now with the gait of a drunken man — straight over to the parsonage ; and there on the porch I met him ; I met them both, amid the shadows of evening, as I had met them in the sunshine of the morning.

The poor, unhappy man seemed to trust me, as if confident of my sympathy ; and, as his eye met mine, the stolid, fierce expression left his face, and great tears rolled down his cheeks ; with a groan he laid his burden at my feet.

I was moved, deeply moved. I know something about men, and a good deal about dogs ; and I knew that these two had been loving, devoted friends ; more truly sympathetic than are many a man and wife. Never was a loving response lacking from this faithful dumb companion. The very quality which a man values most in the wife of his bosom,

unfailing love, always leaped out and up from this poor creature to his master.

I laid my hand on the man's shoulder, and said, tenderly, "My man, you have lost a dear friend. Tell me about it! Come in and sit here!" Then, as he hesitated, I caught his feeling, and I added, "Certainly, bring in his poor body! We won't leave it lying there alone."

So the broken-hearted man came in, and laid his burden beside a chair, and, seating himself, confided his troubles to me — though I was the younger of the two — as a child might confide in its father.

When the sad story was told, with sobs and tears, I had never a chiding word to add; the man's grief was great; and together we gave the poor torn body burial — peace, and rest, under the shade of a cherry-tree, at the end of the garden.

Then I was able to talk more quietly with the poor, broken-hearted fellow; I tried to turn the current of his feelings into other channels; but he constantly reverted to his

great sorrow. After a moment or two of deep, silent reflection, he suddenly exclaimed, with touching eagerness, "Does dogs have sowls, Yer Riverence?"

I assured him that they had, and the thought seemed to give him comfort; then, after another pause, "An' bees there dogs in hiven, Yer Riverence? Good dogs, av coorse, I mane."

"Yes, Michael, I certainly believe that there are."

"Bliss Gard! bliss Gard! and the howly mither av Gard!" he ejaculated, fervently.

However, the sense of "things seen and temporal" was strong upon him; it is strong upon all of us, far too strong; and he could not divest himself of the feeling that his faithful friend Satan was somewhere there in the ground, soul with body.

So I understood and sympathized, when he presently asked, with a repression of eagerness that was very touching, if I had not some job of work about the place, which he could undertake. Accordingly I made

some work for him, and he did it faithfully. And afterwards I set him about some important changes in the flower-beds ; and the result — well, we shall never know the full results of any of our actions until the Great Day — but the result, at the present time, is that Michael, with never a relapse, with never a sign of regret for “the road,” still potters about the grounds and my dear old church ; and, each year, he renews the plants and vines upon the little mound, beside the now mouldering trunk of the cherry-tree.

Sometimes Michael and I talk over the past. Although the true-hearted, single-minded old man never speaks, with any directness, of the sad episode which brought us together, yet, from casual allusions dropped by him, I am sure that the years have done for him, what they should do for us all : they have cleared away many mistakes and false fancies ; and I know, with entire certainty, that poor, dear Satan is no longer “a misunderstood dog.”

II.

I WOULD not wish you to conclude, from my reminiscence concerning "A Misunderstood Dog," that all of a clergyman's experiences are sombre. Knowledge does not come alone through sorrowful happenings, nor are misunderstandings always corrected through pain. My well-worn diary and my unaided memory both convince me of that. If further evidence were needed, however, it might be found in the testimony of my old silk hat, whose story I now tell; a strange story, yet no stranger than many which could be unfolded from their experience by my brethren of the ministry.

MY OLD SILK HAT.

“ Who made the heart, ’t is He alone
Decidedly can try us ;
He knows each chord — its various tone,
Each spring — its various bias.
Then at the balance let ’s be mute,
We never can adjust it ;
What ’s done we partly may compute ;
But know not what ’s resisted.”

ROBERT BURNS.



AMONG the many useful lessons which Carlyle taught the world, was the one embodied in “Sartor Resartus,” — that clothes play a too important part in the affairs of mankind. I have sometimes reflected upon this truth, as I have put on my high, stiff silk hat, to go out on my parish calls ; for I have repeatedly observed, that when I am thus clothed, people on the street bow to me with more respect than when I wear my soft felt hat.

This increased respect is, I think, entirely unconscious on their part, but is none the less

clearly marked ; and it has often aroused in me a momentary feeling of chagrin ; for a true man — especially a clergyman, of forty years' service — likes to feel that he is accepted for himself alone, and not for what he wears. When the critics assure us that the story of William Tell is a myth, and that the tyrant Gessler did not compel people to bow down to his hat, placed on a pole, I am confident that they are correct. The "Internal Evidence" — as we Bible-students say — is against such a tale. Certainly I can well understand that such misapplied deference would not have been countenanced by the sturdy Swiss ruler ; and in the case of a humble minister of the gospel, like myself, it has become a source of regret, and even of shame.

Nevertheless, I cling to my early-formed habits, — as a man of seventy may be pardoned for doing, — and, when I pass through the front hall, on my way out, my hand goes instinctively, and even affectionately, to the old silk hat ; although too often, I fear, I put it on, without the proper preliminary brushing.

From time to time, whenever its dusty and ruffled condition becomes apparent to even my dim careless eyes, I carry it to the little shop in the archway, and there let skilled hands work their will upon it, while I read from some pocket volume, such as I usually have with me.

It is a fascinating eddy, in the hurrying current of street life, is that sleepy little shop under the arch. It seems the depository of all things old and worn and frayed and dilapidated. A half-legible sign, outside the door, feebly asserts that the shop is a "Dyeing House;" but the snows and rains of twenty years have half-effaced the words, and have quite obliterated the "e" in the first one, thus giving a mendacious quality to the old sign; for all within the shop seems to have passed that transitional stage indicated, and to have become utterly, definitively dead.

Wonderful processes of revivification go quietly on, behind the high wooden partition, or screen, which divides transversely the long narrow room; and fur cloaks, which went in

dull and limp, come out glossy and firm ; discolored white kid gloves and shoes, sent by some ball-room belle, are returned spotless to their owner. Encouraging promises are posted on the walls and on the screen, whereby despondent owners of soiled silks and satins are assured that the marks of wear can be entirely concealed, and the effects of careless usage can be quite hidden. It is almost the marvel of Aladdin over again ; “New for old ;” time and ill-usage annihilated.

There, also, are the wigs, and false beards, and “switches,” and curls ; black, blond, gray, and white. What determined struggles they imply, against the mordant ravages of the inexorable years ! “Why is it,” I have asked myself, as I have sat there, “that all these diverse articles, coming from scenes so far apart, passing through conditions of life so widely different, when once decay and disability have come upon them, seek this little shop, their common asylum ? The gregariousness of inanimate things seems proved by their collocation. Is it with shame and sorrow that they

seek one another's lowly company? Or is the little shop their hospital, whither they flee, in hope of a cure for their infirmities, and with longing for a renewed lease of life?"

If you look through the dusty front window, from the outside, you will usually see no person within; only the rusty, decrepit form of the stuffed lynx, over the desk, guardian genius of the place, glaring savagely at his reflection in the mirror, across the counter. When you open the door, a bell rings, behind the screen, and old Timothy comes out, small, slender, stooping, smiling, pushes his big spectacles up from his nose, and, with a simple, child-like expectancy, awaits your commands.

Timothy's humble, shrinking ways invite commands, rather than suggestions or wishes. I have myself been betrayed by them, at times, into dictatorial tones of which I was afterwards ashamed. There are many sensitive, shrinking people in the world, who invite that harsh treatment; usually they are worn, faded wives; but Timothy is a bachelor; and sometimes, as I have seen him handling and

sorting the long wavy tresses of hair, I have fancied that he caressed them in a shy, tender, dreamy way, and that they recalled to him some romance of his youth, long since buried in the past.

It is easy to see that the little old man has great respect and even reverence for all womankind. From my seat in the corner, under the lynx, I have often noted his manner with his customers ; most of them are women. When they deal with him regarding furs or clothing, they are amiable enough ; but when they discuss the " switches," and other more mysterious compositions of " hair goods," they grow irritable ; they are as restive as prisoners in court, under the tongueless testimony, the silent condemnation, of those gray and white tresses.

As for Timothy, he is always quiet and patient, through both calms and storms ; he adjusts crimps and curls, matches desired shades, and even obligingly dons the wigs, to show their exact effect in actual use. For this part of his duties Nature has given Tim-

othy peculiar fitness ; the quaint little man is himself very bald ; whether the trying-on process came about naturally, in consequence of the baldness and of Timothy's accommodating spirit, or whether the demand for such service, by the customers, produced the baldness, this I do not know. It is a problem under the general economic law of "supply and demand" which I have not solved.

I have sometimes smiled reflectively, as I have seen Timothy remove his own wig, and hang it on a certain nail, just under a placard which announces an infallible hair-restorer, guaranteed to cure baldness, by ten or twelve bottles. There hang the wig and the placard together ; the clear evidence of a fact, and the bold denial of the same fact. Strange inconsistency ! Yet no more strange than many conflicting qualities which I have observed in the inconsistent human heart.

Thus the interior of the modest little shop forms a quaint picture ; but, considered as a picture, it holds more than the neutral shades and sombre hues thus far indicated. It has

brighter colors. It has even its "point of high light;" and that "point of high light" is — Lettie; little ten-year-old Lettie. What a radiant, wilful sunbeam she is, in that valley of shadows! What pranks I have seen her play! It was through one of her pranks that I first was made aware of Timothy's baldness. I shall never forget the day when he came through the rear door to meet me, and I suddenly saw the hair of his head lifted, as if by invisible hands, and disappear, leaving his bald, shining pate hopelessly exposed. Then wild, elfish peals of child-laughter arose behind the screen, where the end of a restraining thread was held in Lettie's soft little fist, the other end having been slyly tied, by clever little fingers, to a tuft of Timothy's wig.

It was an embarrassing moment for Timothy; but, once past, it seemed to bring us more closely together, and to draw me naturally into the inner and more domestic circle of the shop.

Lettie was the adopted child of the forceful, rubicund widow, who years before had

founded the shop, employed Timothy, taken Lettie from an Orphans' Home, gained a good patronage, and laid by a snug competence. By her the elderly female portion of the community had been dominated, Timothy being a mild accessory. They looked to her, not alone as to their priestess, but even as to their deity; for, by her, forsooth, the very hairs of their heads were numbered. She conquered all circumstances, and overcame all obstacles, until the circumstance and obstacle of death blocked her path. Then she yielded, and left to little Lettie the shop, several savings-bank books, — and Timothy; Timothy, the shop, and the books were all found to be fastened firmly by law to the child, — the shop and books as property, and Timothy as guardian.

The faithful man took up his difficult duties timidly, but lovingly and patiently. Lettie was the plague of his hours of work, but the panacea of his hours of depression. Whenever customers appeared, Lettie sped swiftly behind the screen; at other times she took her dolls

for walks up and down the shop, and put them to bed under the counters and on the shelves.

I was pleased at finding myself soon counted a friend of the family, and was even flattered, when the child pursued her career of mischief in my presence, regardless of my watchful but indulgent eyes. One of her fascinating pranks was to array herself in the cleansed or dyed garments which awaited their owners. The little elf developed the airs and graces of a princess; she tossed her head, and caught up her train, with great spirit. But, alas, there were accidents; soiled and torn gowns resulted. At such times, Timothy always began by sternly re-proving her, and she responded with tears; but, in a trice, the tears were swept away by a dash of her rosy fingers, and she became transformed from accused to accuser; she ceased her moans of regret, and turned imperiously upon poor Timothy, angrily re-proving him for allowing her "to be such a naughty girl;" under her storm of indignation, the little old man shrank back in a

perplexed way, confused by his love for her, and by his awe of her dominating femininity. It was a strange sight, to see him standing in confusion, beneath her torrent of invective, a slave to her beauty and her imperious manner, yet struggling to assert his authority as her guardian.

It was on such a scene as this — I sitting quietly in the corner — that the shop-door opened, one afternoon, and a woman entered ; resolute, lithe. She advanced to the glass case of hair goods. She stood near me, not seeing me, and I noted her worn, but once handsome face, her straw-colored hair, and her bold, penetrating glance. She was like a hawk, in the aquiline curve of her delicate nose, and always alert, even defiant.

At the first warning clang of the door-bell, the little drama, enacting by Timothy and Lettie, collapsed like a house of cards ; the child's emotions of anger and regret, and Timothy's feelings of displeasure and shyness and reproof, all were absorbed and obliterated by the fixed habit of action which that bell

aroused ; Lettie sped away behind the screen, like a young quail surprised by the hunter ; and Timothy, clearing his throat, and pulling nervously at his stringy necktie, advanced to the customer.

I looked at them, as I often look at people who are meeting for the first time, with a certain analytical interest ; my calling leads me to study people with some minuteness ; and I have often been struck by the delicate adjustment of wills and emotions which goes on as two people, quite unknown to each other, begin acquaintance. This adjustment commences with the first exchange of glances, extends through the grasping of hands, is shown in the tones of the voice, and proceeds continuously through the exchanges of ideas and emotions that follow.

In this case, however, there was not the free play of forces, on both sides, which makes such an introductory meeting interesting to the observer. The woman was free indeed with her glances, which played like daring rapier-thrusts over the mild face and

shrinking form of the old man ; but he, as trained shopkeeper, was worn smooth by many perplexing, stormy encounters with many kinds of customers ; and he presented to her only the business self, which he kept for that purpose, — attentive, patient, intelligent, sympathetic. His shy eyes asked respectfully, “What do you wish ?” and his slightly bent form said plainly, “I will give you my very best attention.”

She began at once, speaking with nervous energy : “I want this hair of mine brought back to its natural color ; and then I want a braid, or switch, to add to it.”

She took off her large showy hat, as she spoke ; I think she could not yet have perceived me, for she continued proudly, and even defiantly, “I attempt no concealment : I am tired of having my hair that color ; I want it brought back to its natural shade ; which is” — here she began to scan the various specimens of braids and switches in the glass case ; but seemed not to find the color she sought. Then her glance swept around

the room, and along the shelves ; and, for the first time, she saw me ; but she took no notice of me.

“Not a very large stock you keep,” she remarked, with irritation in her tone. “There ! What is that ?” and she started forward, to look at a braid which caught her eye. “No, that is too dark.” She checked herself, and seemed unable to find what she desired.

At that moment, little Lettie slipped quietly forth from behind the screen, seized a doll, which she had forgotten in her hasty departure, and darted again out of sight. She seemed like a silent little sylph, flashing thus into view, and then away again, her brown tresses tossing like the crest of a wave, over her shoulders.

Instantly the woman exclaimed, “There ! There is the shade I mean. That child ! Call her out again !” And she spoke like one used to command ; wilful, determined.

Poor old Timothy was disconcerted. This demand was outside the usual shop routine ; he had not the mental resources to meet it.

He leaned uneasily, first on one foot, then on the other ; the front shop, with its stock of inanimate belongings, was one world ; the rear shop, with Lettie, was quite another. This transition from the one to the other was too rapid, too violent for him ; and he was thrown into some confusion.

“ Call that child out here ! I say,” repeated the woman. Then a deep flush swept over her pale face, and her thin lips contracted with a sneer : “ You need n’t be afraid ; I sha’n’t harm her.”

Timothy remained silent, removed and wiped his glasses, nervously, and looked over at me in his helpless appealing way. His business self had been thrust aside ; and he was now a shy, sensitive, anxious guardian of childhood.

The woman was not accustomed to be balked ; she took a few steps toward the rear of the shop, raised her voice, and called, “ Little girl, little girl, won’t you come out here a moment ? I would like to speak to you.”

I started with surprise at the altered sound of her voice ; her tones were now sweet and gentle, and contrasted agreeably with the sharp, dry, nervous voice, in which she had previously spoken. And her face, too, following some mysterious law of sympathy, grew softer and sweeter, in harmony with her tones. I think the change was partly unconscious, and partly the wilful act of a dramatic nature, bent on showing us that she had a better side than we thought.

Lettie, childlike, came again into view, with all traces of her recent stormy outbreak passed away ; her anger was as fleeting as a summer shower ; and she advanced confidently to Timothy's side, then paused and took his hand.

"There !" exclaimed the woman, thinking no longer of the child as a personality, and interested solely in the tint of her hair. "That is the very shade I mean. Strange that you have n't any made up, of that exact color ; I wish that you — "

She had drawn near the two, as she spoke,

and her closer approach probably brought out the little girl's features more distinctly ; for she suddenly stopped short, threw up both hands, with a quick convulsive gesture, and cried out, "Where did you get that child ? Why don't you speak, man ?"

The words came out like the sharp cracking of a rifle-volley ; came out with a passion which brought me to my feet ; Timothy shrank before her fierce glance, and uttered no word. Lettie clung to her guardian's hand, and showed signs of fear. I quickly found myself, hardly knowing what I did, beside the two ; and before us the strange creature stood, her face convulsed, her form trembling, as if under the pressure of some powerful emotion, which she struggled to control.

Then she spoke again ; this time in a low, intense tone, which vibrated like the lower notes of a violin. "Tell me ! I command you ! I entreat you ! Where did you get this child ? Is she yours ?"

Timothy looked at me appealingly, and I said simply, "Answer her !"

"No, she is not mine," he replied, in a quavering voice. "I am her guardian."

"Whose child is she?" came the next hot inquiry; and her hands clenched each other, with vise-like intensity.

Again the old man glanced at me, and I nodded for him to go on.

"She is the adopted child of my former employer, a widow; she was taken from a Home. She —"

"What Home?" broke in the wild, passionate creature; and her breath came in short gasps, as she leaned eagerly forward, as if to pluck the words, before their time, from Timothy's lips.

"From the Orphans' Home in L—— St., New York. She was a year old when my employer —"

He did not finish the sentence; for the woman, with a smothered cry, bounded forward, and, before we could prevent her, clasped the child in her arms, showered kisses upon her, and broke into a tempest of sobs and endearing exclamations.

Lettie struggled fiercely, and burst into tears ; but hers were tears of anxiety and fear ; I took the woman's arm, but could not have unclasped her grasp without violent effort ; so I waited, seeing that no harm was being done to the child ; and I divined that forces, too powerful to be lightly interfered with, were here at work. I bent over the child, clasped as she was in her mother's arms, soothed her, and told her that this woman loved her very much, and would be very kind to her ; upon which she grew quieter, and gave up her struggling.

Then I went to Timothy, as I saw him grope his way, like a blind man, across the store, and sink into a chair. How I pitied him ! He knew, as I did, that the woman's heart was sure in its unerring mother-instinct. And his anxiety for his idolized little one, his awful dread of losing her, took the life out of him in a moment.

The woman turned her face toward us, and, despite the tear-stains, we saw that Nature had moulded that face and little Lettie's

after one pattern. Timothy was indeed the child's legal protector, but such a passionate outbreak as we had witnessed was a plea for motherhood, in a higher court than any commonwealth can offer.

Mother and child were now talking softly together; and Lettie, though surprised and trembling, no longer showed fear. There was a tenderness in the touch of that caressing hand which no man could hope to equal; and out of those tear-dimmed eyes poured a wealth of affection which found its way straight to the child's heart.

"Ask her what her name is!" whispered Timothy to me; for he could not speak aloud. And I put the question.

A strange, hard, sarcastic smile wreathed her lips, as she answered promptly, with a return of her old defiant manner, "I have had many names, in my day, good sir. A pleasing variety." And a slight tinge of sadness crossed her still handsome features, as she paused, recalling the past. But in a moment she steadied herself, came a step

nearer, and spoke with a directness which carried conviction: "Many names, but my real name — and the name of this little one — is Reynolds." And she threw her arm about the child, swept a defiant glance over old Timothy and myself, and stood like a tigress protecting her young.

I have not seen many plays enacted on the stage; but surely no Cushman or Siddons ever filled more fully the character of a tragedy-queen than did that passionate woman, her heart expanding under the pressure of her new-found love. But her defiance was uncalled for; Timothy mutely nodded, and raised his arm, in assent; the name was indeed Lettie's real name, as he well knew, though I had been ignorant of it, until now.

Luckily, during this absorbing scene no customers had entered; if any had, I hardly know how they would have been attended to. Now we all grew calmer, and talked together, and felt ourselves drawing a little nearer to one another, in understanding and sympathy.

However, the real problem now faced us ; nobody saw it more clearly than did Lettie's mother. It would not be right that she should claim any authority over her child. This she said to me herself ; and I counselled her to take employment, not far from the child ; and, by redeeming herself, and by not too frequent visits to the little shop, I believed that time and nature would solve the problem.

This was agreed to by Timothy ; but only with repeated and solemn declarations that he would never give up his legal care of the child ; without her sunny presence he felt that life held nothing for him.

A day or two later, with the aid of a wise, large-hearted friend, a position was found for the woman, and she began her new life.

Here began, also, a peculiar change of relations, among these three persons ; a gradual change, which I now look back upon with the utmost satisfaction. I shall be pardoned, I trust, if I recall it with considerable pride, because so much of a minister's effort shows

no distinct results ; it seems to be dissipated into thin air.

Lettie's mother — " Mrs. Reynolds," as I scrupulously and even conspicuously called her — at once showed the really good sense, which was buried under her frivolous, defiant exterior, by her change of garb. She appeared, the next day, in plain black garments, with a hat of quiet neutral colors ; and the change in garb was accompanied by a corresponding change in her manner. Her glance was still penetrating, but had lost its boldness ; her actions were quick, alert, but not so aggressive ; and her voice was quieter, less nervous, less metallic ; her entire manner was modified in an appreciable degree ; the powerful emotion of maternal love was working a miracle in the woman's character, and I watched its progress, with growing delight.

Several weeks passed ; and I made an effort to see her, at times, at her work ; and, occasionally, as my old silk hat gave me excuse, I visited the little shop under the arch ; and once or twice I found her there,

apparently at peace with both the child and distrustful, anxious old Timothy.

One day, as I entered, I was surprised — and yet not wholly surprised — to see Mrs. Reynolds, seated behind a little desk, close beside the ferocious but impotent lynx, busy with some account-books. She greeted me with courtesy, as usual, and yet with a trace of shyness, which I had never before seen in her. Timothy, too, showed a slight confusion of manner, as he came forth from the rear shop. “I have engaged her,” he stammered, “to keep my books; they were in bad shape, and she has great skill at accounts.”

I smiled approvingly; but I noticed a significant change of attitude between the two. I doubt if Timothy — simple, shy soul that he was — had any clear idea of such a change; but to me it was evident that she, the stronger, abler character, had become the leader; she had gained the old man’s confidence by her thorough-going change of conduct; and I believed that it had come about, too, with entire sincerity, though with dis-

tinct, conscious intention, on her part. Little Lettie treated her warmly and trustfully; and the three, standing together that day, made a picture of hope and happiness, which brought joy to my old heart.

Timothy told me, in confidence, — and it seemed to surprise him more than it surprised me, — that Lettie's mother had said not a word about any rights of hers regarding the child. I respected the woman's wisdom and tact the more, as I learned this. To me it was growing clearer and clearer that she was making the great struggle of her life; her love for Lettie was the transforming force; and she was bent upon gaining the respect and regard of both child and guardian, by deserving it. That she loved Lettie, I had no doubt; but as to any real affection for Timothy, poor blinking, shambling, shy Timothy, of that I was not clear. Still, the discipline of sorrow, and even of sin, — repented sin, — makes us fix our admiration and our affection more on the sterling virtues of character, in our associates, and less on agreeable

externalities. If Timothy had any growing interest in her, he showed no trace of it; certainly not in my presence; but I could see that he leaned more and more on her self-reliant nature.

However, there were more than three persons in their little world. Small as was their circle of interests, it intersected many other circles. In a word, they had customers, and neighbors, and friends; and, among these, were several who looked, with growing suspicion, upon the occupants of the little shop. Through one of my parishioners, I learned of the neighborhood gossip, which went on with increasing boldness. How persistently people do claim the right to regulate the concerns of their friends! Not one of these busybodies knew as much about the situation as did I; and I felt wholly unwarranted in saying a word to alter the course of events; yet they laid down rules confidently, and prophesied evil, and talked about legal interference.

Of all this, to be sure, dear little Lettie was entirely and sweetly unaware; and Timothy,

too, never perceived the ill favor into which he had fallen, in the neighborhood. Kind, pure soul that he was, he went on with his work, conscious of no evil, knowing only that his heart was lighter, and his duties easier, than they had been for many a year. As for alert, sensitive Mrs. Reynolds, she was as quick as a hare to scent suspicion; she saw everything that was visible, and divined much that was invisible. I had grown to understand her so well that I could detect, by her manner, as customers entered the store, or friends stopped to exchange greetings with Timothy, exactly how great was their opposition to her. There was a toss of the head, and a pronounced courtesy in her tones, which varied as distinctly as the most sensitive barometer, amid the varying currents of the atmosphere.

I felt considerable anxiety as to the outcome of all this. I felt that strong ties of affection were insensibly growing up around and among these three hearts; and I dreaded any rending of these ties; yet I hardly saw how any other result could be reached.

One day, as I was walking near the shop, I saw a man looking intently through the window. He was a large florid man, past middle life, slow but firm in his movements, dressed in a showy and rather expensive fashion. There was a gross quality about his face, with its double chin, and an unhealthy tint of red in the hollows of his cheeks.

A moment later, he entered the shop. I turned back, after passing, and followed him in. He was standing in front of Mrs. Reynolds' desk, leaning on his cane, and was regarding her with a leer of surprise and satisfaction. As he took off his hat, with an exaggerated and mocking courtesy, I saw that his scant supply of hair was parted low down on one side, just over the tip of his ear; in this way he was enabled to comb the long wisps straggling up over the extensive bald tract on the top of his head. His moustache had been treated with dye. He was a faded work of art.

Timothy, seeing that the visitor was engaged with Mrs. Reynolds, went on arranging

one of the cases on the counter. I entered, unperceived by the visitor, and stood near the door, feeling vague anxiety at his presence. Mrs. Reynolds saw me, but made no sign. She seemed much excited, and her eyes flashed with the old fierce light.

The man spoke slowly, heavily. "Glad to see you again. Missed you a good deal. What did you give me the slip for? Rather shabby, that! But now I've found you, I won't hold it against you."

His voice had a smooth, oily kind of assurance in it; there was a faint suggestion, too, of hidden power in the tones. His speech and movements were slow, lethargic, but they were those of a man who usually got his own way. I saw, at once, that he had an evil power over the woman; his was a stolid nature, which could tire out the feverish antagonism of her volatile temperament.

Mrs. Reynolds sat rigidly in her seat. Her hands were clenched tightly. She said nothing.

He waited a moment, but seemed in nowise

disconcerted by her manner. "Say now, pet!" He went on, in the same slow, suave, confident way, "Come along! You've played at this little game of pious propriety long enough, haven't you?"

Still not a word from the defiant, desperate woman. She looked at him with a concentration of anger and hate, which would have made any sensitive man quail.

"Jove, you're handsome, though, pet. Haven't gone off a particle in your looks, I'll swear." And he swung his cane idly, as if speaking about the weather.

Timothy looked up, and seemed to realize that something unusual was going on; he nervously took off and wiped his glasses, put them on, and came a step or two nearer.

The suave, confident visitor leaned forward over the desk, and, still smiling, moved his hand toward one of hers. "Come now, let's shake and make up!"

I saw her tremble. There was a wild look in her eyes. She seemed almost hypnotized, under his steady, compelling gaze. She was

now more like a terror-stricken animal, under the spell of a serpent. She gasped, and the color left her face. Then his hand touched hers ; and, at the evil touch, she sprang up, with a cry of hate and horror, and leaned, trembling, against the wall behind.

I walked quickly forward. Timothy did likewise. "Sir," I said, as calmly as I could, "what is the meaning of this?"

He turned slowly; he did everything slowly, but he carried an impression of irresistible will. "And who are you?" he asked, in the same calm tone, with the same sensuous good-nature on his face, but with a faint hint of contempt under all.

I disregarded the inquiry. "Do you know this woman? What right have you to come here?" Then an idea struck me. "Are you her husband?" I asked, with some anxiety.

He seemed amused at the last question; then he looked familiarly at her, and said, "How's that, pet? He wants to know if I'm your husband." But she wrenched her gaze from him, gave me a most appealing

look, and said, in a faint, but earnest tone, "I am not this man's wife. I am a widow. I have told you the truth."

Then the man turned toward poor, shrinking, withered Timothy. He did not seem to regard him as worth addressing directly; he looked at him, a moment, and a sneer crept over his face. "Who is he?" he asked, facing me again.

I could barely restrain my rising anger; but I knew that I must do it. I replied firmly, "He is the proprietor of this shop. He is my friend, and the employer and friend of Mrs. Reynolds."

The man chuckled deeply. "Friend and employer!" I heard him repeat under his breath; and he looked at the trembling woman in a most insulting way. It made me grip my cold hands with anger. I was hardly conscious of what I did; but I laid my hand on his arm. "Leave this place!" I said sternly. "You see that you are not wanted here. Take your unwholesome presence away!"

I confess now, as I write out, calmly, the account of the scene, that at this point my consciousness of my peaceful profession had about left me. I did not know how the leering debauchee would take my words; I did not much care. Whether I would have followed my demand with physical force, I do not know; but at that moment my attention was drawn to Timothy. He showed signs of much internal commotion; he took off and replaced his spectacles twice, pulled hard at his neck-tie, wiped his reddening face feverishly, cleared his throat, made one or two spasmodic starts, and finally stumbled along to Mrs. Reynolds' side, as she stood leaning against the wall. After one or two abortive attempts, the shy, sensitive fellow managed to say something to her, in a low tone, with downcast eyes. Then he took her hand—or she took his; I never was sure which one led, in that daring act; and then a deep sigh of relief escaped me, as I saw the trembling woman lean her head on his shoulder, and give way to tears.

Timothy had solved the problem. This crisis had roused him to a boldness which was unequalled in his history. I divined his purpose, and waited for him to take the next step. He began, his lips moved, but he could not articulate. He looked at me helplessly.

Then Mrs. Reynolds roused herself. She took the lead, at this juncture, as she had done in their business affairs. She put her arm through his, and spoke, with downcast eyes, but with calm, humble sincerity: "This good, noble man is to be my husband. Our friend, this clergyman, is to marry us." Then she raised her head, looked straight at the gross, unctuous man, and the old fierce light began to kindle in her eyes, as she raised her hand and silently pointed to the front door.

I removed my grasp from his arm. The smile of self-confidence faded from his flabby face, and a look of awkward surprise came in its place. No further word was spoken. He paused a moment, looked at me, looked at those two, muttered an oath under his breath,

shrugged his shoulders, and then walked slowly out of the shop, a discomfited man.

The next day Timothy and Mrs. Reynolds came alone to the parsonage, and I married them ; and I am free to say, that of all the marriages, for which I have been in part responsible, none ever resulted more happily. Exactly how much of the significance of that interview in the shop Timothy clearly grasped, I do not know. We never spoke of it, he and I ; but, under the new order of things, neighborhood gossip was silenced, and little Lettie found a faithful, loving father and mother ; and, whenever I have occasion to visit the little shop under the arch, the whole place seems better lighted than formerly ; perhaps the dusty windows have been cleaned ; but I suspect that the increased light comes from the sun of prosperity, which shines so brightly into that happy quaint little home ; and some of this light, reflected, falls upon my waning life, and warms my old heart, as I go my parish ways, — I and my old silk hat.

III.

It was said, by an ancient Hebrew prophet, that "your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams." This is a text much in favor with preachers, especially with young men. Standing firmly upon it, they cast the horoscope of the church, and predict the coming of the millennium; but, later in life, they learn that only half of the text is forward-looking; the "visions" which the "young men see," are visions of the future; but the "dreams" of the "old men" are dreams of the past.

I accept it frankly, therefore, as one of the evidences of my advanced years, that my thought frequently reverts to the olden time, and I take deep satisfaction in living over again those early experiences in my profession. Looked at from this remote period of

time, however, I can hardly distinguish, sometimes, the verifiable materials of memory from the "dreams" of an "old man." They were serious, anxious struggles, those of my first parishes, now seen by me to have been quite as serious and anxious for the parishes as for myself. I fear that one or two of those parishes suffered sadly at my "'prentice hands." Yet, through them, I gained instruction which no theological seminary can possibly give.

There was that sleepy little country parish of Hillside. Not five hundred souls in all the township; many of the young people had gone away to the cities, and many of the older ones had been "gathered to their fathers." Yet I was expected to bring together as large congregations as had assembled in the old days. The officers of the parish expected the church to be as full as formerly, and ignored the fact that the people were, most of them, sleeping peacefully, over in the cemetery, beneath the hill. There was to be found the real congregation, a "congregation

invisible ;” and no effort of mine, but the archangel’s trump alone, could summon them from their slumbers.

I was sometimes made almost desperate by the demands put upon me, and by my sense of the impossibility of meeting them. It was at this time that I first read Mrs. Shelley’s weird story of the Frankenstein ; and, at about the same time, I conceived the plan, here related, which now comes up in my mind, as a fantastic memory, as an improbable and impossible dream. In writing about it, I dare not affirm that I am recounting literal history ; for at this distance, fact and fiction are confusingly blended, and I will not attempt to separate them ; but will simply give my narrative, as it recurs to me, at times, causing me not a little quiet amusement.

A FRANKENSTEIN FAMILY.

"Meanwhile, in our era of the World, those same Church-Clothes have gone sorrowfully out-at-elbows; nay, far worse, many of them have become mere hollow Shapes, or Masks, under which no living Figure or Spirit any longer dwells."

THOMAS CARLYLE.



NEVER could determine, satisfactorily to myself, the exact cause or causes that brought this family into existence. On the whole, I am inclined to think that they sprang from their own clothes; for, as I run back through the varying fortunes of their career, I find myself at last in the garret of a house, a parsonage, with those long rows of missionary garments staring me in the face.

Yes, I incline to the opinion that if those dusty, rusty contributions to the foreign missions had never found lodgement within my walls, the Frankenstein Family never would have stepped forth so bravely, though so disastrously, into life.

There they were, however, coats of all shades, dresses of all colors, trousers, hats, cloaks, shawls, and unlimited stores of underclothing. As they hung along the walls of the garret, a bonnet, cloak, and dress, or hat, coat, and trousers on each hook, they reminded one of a company of soldiers, who had been defeated in the battle of life, and had come, in silent despair, and hung themselves up out of the way, in the dim quiet of that secluded old garret.

Probably it was this resemblance to a company of human beings, which one day suggested to me the use to which they were afterward put. I had just been talking with a brother minister about the smallness of our respective congregations. Each of us had been in Hillside about a year; each had come from the seminary, confident that his power of eloquence would fill his meeting-house with a throng of enraptured listeners; and each had been disappointed.

"Tyler," said I, "what shall we do, to induce people to attend service?"

Tyler was a capital fellow and a good friend ; and together we often discussed our church problems ; but, on this problem of church attendance, we never could reach any joint conclusion. Tyler was inclined to lay the blame on the people, while I often remarked, in a hopeless way, that if we only preached better, people would surely come to hear us.

“ I ’m not so sure of that,” urged my companion, upon the day of which I write. “ I ’m disposed to think that the same law governs church attendance that governs combustion. You know you can’t make two coals, or three, or five, into a self-sustaining fire. I learned that in college, one cold morning in February ; but a *mass* of coals — say twenty or fifty pieces — will take care of itself when it is once started. Now you mark my word, Livingstone, it’s the same with congregations ; if you can only get the attendance up to a certain number, it will take care of itself. People like a crowd ; and if you can only get up that crowd, then it will go on perpetuating itself,

Sunday after Sunday, each one coming to see what the other came for."

It was a bold analogy, this of Tyler's, and I doubted its soundness. My friend leaned his rotund form against the mantel, and awaited my comment.

I shook my head. "I see your idea," said I, "but I don't think it will work." I walked nervously about my friend's study, for a time, discussing his original scheme; then the conversation turned into other channels, and I presently took my leave.

Although I had expressed great doubt of the feasibility of Tyler's idea, yet the more I pondered it the more it took hold of me. I recalled, with distinctness, that when in charge of a mission school in Boston I often added to the audiences of various forlorn lecture courses, by sending to this hall and to that quite a large squad of my poor congregation. The managers often sent me a score of tickets, and I responded by sending several benches of good average listeners. The lecturers liked it, and the managers said it

gave an air of "crowded audience" which was comforting to them.

This conversation, with the reflections aroused by it, was one of the causes that called into being the Frankenstein Family. Another cause was the following :

I was ambitious to become a good extempore speaker. I always had aimed at this kind of preaching, while in the seminary, but had signally failed, through excessive timidity. As soon as I was settled in a parish I renewed my efforts; and I was accustomed to learn my Sunday discourse, or parts of it, and speak it to a fancied audience in the church Saturday afternoons. The better to aid the illusion of a "listening congregation," I one day propped up a coat or two and some shawls in the ends of pews. The next step was easy, especially with the aid of my younger brother, who, in those days, was living with me, and was of a very inventive mind.

I remember when the idea dawned upon me. It was one dismal Saturday afternoon.

The next day threatened to be rainy, and I had sad anticipation of empty pews. Then, looking at the coats and shawls that composed my congregation, I happened to recall my friend Tyler's theory of crowded churches. Could it be that he was in any degree correct? Would a thronged house perpetuate itself, merely through the gregarious instincts of men? Then came the recollection of that long line of defeated soldiers, hanging in the garret. I started up at the very idea. What if they were here? How they would fill up these deserted seats!

I was under increasing excitement, as my mind ran over the suggestive plan. I glanced at the windows, and even they encouraged me, for they were of stained glass, and very dark. They were the Quixotic bequest of Aunt Polly Merritt, and harmonized in no way with the plain bare old edifice; but they certainly did throw a gloom over the place, which, in my present state of mind, was actually cheering.

Yes, I would venture it. There was the

four o'clock service. At that hour of the day, especially if the day were cloudy, the church would be very dim, and would lend itself admirably to the daring plan. I resolved, on the spot, that the next afternoon, which promised to be dull, should see my congregation increased by a half-dozen quiet listeners.

The plan, when communicated to Seth, my inventive young brother, filled his soul with delight. He would hear of no delay. That very evening we went into the garret, and examined the forces there marshalled along the wall. They were in really fair condition. Seth saw great possibilities in them ; and he had plans, I may here add, which far transcended my own.

The garments had been originally gathered in aid of the destitute Hottentots, by an old-time predecessor of mine ; but he had found it easier to collect the supply of clothing than to raise the money for its transferral to Africa. Accordingly the garments had been hung in the old garret, and had come down,

like an heirloom, to each new generation of ministers. Enough scarecrows had been sent forth from that company to supply each hill of corn, in the adjoining corn-field, with its own particular sentinel. Yet the supply was boundless, and the garments left were the best of the original lot, although they smelled strongly of carbolic acid, as we stirred them up ; and out of various folds and pockets fell pieces of camphor. I know not to whose painstaking, preservative instincts, in the line of my predecessors' wives, this care was due ; but, whoever she was, to her I was deeply grateful.

I will not linger over the details of preparation, and the skill of my young relative. Suffice it to say that, with the aid of strings and hay, Seth increased my afternoon congregation from fifteen to twenty-one auditors. When I entered upon the sermon, there they sat, wisely deployed about the premises, skilfully adjusted under the corners of the galleries, with a view to "shadow effects" rather than to those of full light, as orderly

and solemn a company as ever dozed under a dull sermon.

I never preached better. I was inspired by the success of my plan. I even forgot, in the excitement of my sermon, which were the real and which the make-believe auditors; and several times I addressed convincing arguments to a closely veiled female figure in black, just beyond the second window at my left, and then smiled, as I recalled the difficulty experienced by Seth, in keeping the wisps of hay from sticking through the numerous holes in that veil.

I confess that I began to feel some moral qualms, now that the experiment had succeeded so well. Outward obstacles being removed, I now became conscious of inward barriers. Was it right for me to thus sanction this imposture? I had not lifted a finger, myself, but I had aided and abetted Seth. I was responsible for these fictitious, dummy auditors, and I half inclined to order their destruction. Yet, as I reflected more, I saw that there were points to be urged on

the other side. The silent creatures did no harm, personally. Moreover, they helped me to preach better, and they also helped bring people to church, where they might receive some benefit from what they heard. Then, too, I reflected grimly that the greater portion of any congregation are dummies. They are machines, or nearly so, in their religion. They can be adjusted to a position, by a leading mind, and they will keep that position until changed to another, by some force outside themselves. As I discussed the case, for and against myself, I felt worthy of acquittal; and, pushing the war into Africa, as did Scipio, I even felt like asking for compensation for the good I had done.

My bold plan was an assured success, at least to this extent, that it was likely to escape detection; and it did give an appearance of "numbers," to the congregation, which was a help to preaching. Seth was delighted, even more than was I; though I fear his joy was attributable chiefly to his own success in costuming and posing the

figures. There was a slight increase in my real congregation, too, after a few Sundays had elapsed. Perhaps they were drawn by curiosity. If so, they came in vain ; for the quiet, shy people in the dim corners never encouraged conversation. Nobody could surpass them in "coldness." Seth one Sunday observed Deacon Means, my most "constant" member, address a question to an elderly male figure in a buff waistcoat, under the gallery ; but, getting no response, the worthy man turned away, with an expression of indignant scorn upon his countenance.

I was at first somewhat puzzled as to the best way of securing an "exit" for my little family of the pews. An exit, as everybody knows, is not easy to achieve ; it is the masterpiece of manners ; but I met the difficulty by saying, boldly, "Those persons whom I have requested to meet me will please to stay, after the others have gone." That did it. A few of my real members lingered, once or twice, to see what might be going on ; but they never could outsit the patient figures in

faded muslin, and wrinkled, camphor-smelling coats.

I am sure that there must have been much curious speculation, in the parish, as to these strangers in the pews. There always is far more talk in a parish than comes to the pastor's ears. He can safely count on there being ten pieces of gossip afloat for every one that reaches him. Occasionally Seth caught some fragment of a rumor. For a time it was thought that these new-comers were some of my friends from Boston; and, so long as this theory held the public mind, it led to no perceptible harm, except in the way of a change of fashion among my people. Coming from Boston, these "friends of the pastor" were supposed to have the "very latest thing," in garments and bonnets; and, thanks to the softening effect of the dark windows and the protecting gloom of the galleries, Seth had the rare privilege of setting the styles for our people, during several weeks. For example, he found an innocent delight in adjusting a yellow ribbon upon Miss Bings's

hat (he had already given names to his family), and seeing upon how many hats it would be copied the next Sunday.

Among the rumors which held currency, for a time, regarding the strangers, was the theory that they were members of a church committee from some other town, come to hear the pastor, with a view of calling him to their parish. This theory gained favor, also, from the fact that the pastor was really preaching better than was his wont. Preaching better I certainly was, but the reader has already been acquainted with the cause of my increased animation. However, this rumor only put me in a more desirable and honored light, before my congregation; and they severally resolved, after the manner of congregations, that if anybody wished me elsewhere, then they wished me, more than ever, to remain where I was.

Thus matters went more happily with me, for a time. My congregation did not increase greatly, yet a few more came; and, with my "family" now increased by the ambitious

Seth to ten, there was a tolerably good showing, for a country church. I dared not say anything to my friend Tyler. I intended, if the project proved to be sound, to help him to similar results, by similar means; but as yet no human being was in the secret, outside my own household.

There was only one person who was likely to penetrate the mystery. He was the organist, a sharp-visaged, morose individual, who had an ugly way of appearing on the church premises at the most unexpected times, often when Seth was in the act of transporting his weird creatures to the big closet of my study, which was their retreat. Once the organist remarked, in a sub-bass voice and with a perplexed air, that "the new people did n't add much volume of sound, on the hymn tunes." I trembled inwardly as I overheard his dangerous reflection, but held my peace.

When the climax drew near — and I sigh as I recall the sad event, even at this remote distance — when the end of this happy period came, the disaster was not due to the organ-

ist, but to my own flesh and blood — to Seth himself; rather, I may say, to the insatiate ambition which always was a characteristic of the boy's nature. If it had not been for that gnawing ambition in Seth's breast, which would not let him rest content with the much-admired "well enough," then I would not have given to my interesting figures, in the dark corners, the name I have put at the head of this chapter, the name of the "Frankenstein Family."

Seth's work, thus far, had been a success. Nobody could doubt that, who was in a position to give impartial judgment. Often did I compliment him on his skill, but as often did I check him from any further advances. Alas! he would not be admonished. He had heard me preach so often, that he breathed in my speech like air, and never really suspected that I meant it.

When I saw that the restless lad was bent upon improving his workmanship, I had forebodings of ill, but I said no more. The first addition made to "the family" was an in-

genious arrangement by which they could be bent at the hips, without losing their stability and dignity of poise; and Seth, from his retired seat, was enabled to pull a cord, as the prayer-time came, and lo! every man and woman of them bent over, and rested forehead reverently on the back of the pew in front.

I did not discover this valuable addition to the qualifications of my silent friends, until after they had successfully performed for two Sundays. In fact, I never, with my own eyes, saw them do this, as they were not put into their new attitude until after my own position for prayer had been taken. Seth enthusiastically assured me, however, that they worked capitally; and that it was a good example for our stiff-necked Puritan people; so I said nothing.

If the ambitious fellow had rested content with this remarkable exhibition of his mechanical skill, no harm would have resulted; but, alas! he pushed his experiments on and on. The next thing he attempted — and to

his credit I say that he achieved it — was to contrive that several of the “family” should make contributions, just as the other members of the congregation did, when the contribution boxes were passed.

This was a difficult mechanical problem, as will be easily seen ; but it was met by the addition of a hinge to the elbow, and a “clutch” in the end of the sleeve, these being worked by two cords. All the “family” were not supplied with this device, but only those whose framework was firm enough to bear the extra leverage put upon them by this complicated motion.

Seth practised them a good deal in private, and finally said they would work ; and they did : except for a slight creaking at first, which was easily remedied by a drop or two of oil, they did work remarkably well. The only flaw in their motion was that they could swing the arm at a certain elevation, but no higher than this ; and when Deacon Means, in passing the contribution box to Miss Bings, happened to pass it into the pew

at a slightly higher elevation, that irresponsible female swung her arm forward *under* the box, and dropped the penny on the floor, with unmoved dignity. The place was too dim to make the finding it easy, and search was luckily postponed.

During several Sundays the "family" worked satisfactorily, and restless Seth made no venturesome advance on his first attainments: at least he attempted nothing in public, beyond what he had already tried so successfully. This was in public, I repeat; in private, Seth had planned a new feature, which, if it could have been carried to completion, would have eclipsed all his previous mechanical efforts.

This was an artificial gloved hand, which was intended to be added to the right arm of a few members of the family. The arm was to be extended, by the device previously contrived; then, on the hand being grasped, it was to return a gentle, dignified pressure, thus completing a very proper though somewhat unresponsive handshake. This plan,

however, was too complicated. I saw its defects and dangers before Seth did; but even he could not longer urge it for public trial, when one day, in private, the mechanism became clogged, and he found his hand clasped by the new invention, beyond his power to free it. He hammered the thing into fragments before he could get clear, and never again tried to do much with it.

However, his enthusiasm soon found vent in another channel; and this time he made public use of his invention very soon after beginning work upon it. The plan he had in mind was so to arrange the buff-waistcoated old man, with joints, that he could be raised to a standing posture; and this was successfully accomplished, with the attendant condition that he should rest his hands, which were provided with hooks, on the pew in front. The arms served as braces and supports; and when Grandfather Smallweed — as Seth called him, from his hooked, clawlike hands — rose from his seat, and dropped his claw hands on the pew before him, you would

never have suspected, save for a slight shaking motion, when Seth did not pull the cords evenly, that he was not a creature of real flesh and blood.

Seth was especially interested in the working of this invention, for this reason. The only person in the congregation who retained the old-time habit of rising, during the prayer, was Deacon Means. All the others either bowed their heads upon the pew in front, or rested their heads on their hands. Deacon Means, however, nothing daunted by his solitary observance of the old custom, persisted in rising. He had risen, the first day I preached in Hillside, as a timid candidate, and hardly a Sunday had he missed, since that day.

Seth resolved to give the dogged old saint a companion ; and, to that end, Grandfather Smallweed was fitted out with the necessary apparatus ; and it must be confessed that he was quite as easy and firm in his movements as was the rheumatic old deacon. This went on, very successfully, for a few Sundays ; that is to say, it was successful as a mechanical

device. I fancied, however, from the little I saw, that the worthy deacon rather resented the action of the white-headed old man in the buff waistcoat. He had enjoyed the distinguished monopoly of this custom so long, that he had come to hold it as a prerogative, and would not share it gracefully with any new-comer.

All had gone well for several weeks. I preached better and better, under the constant stimulus of a fairly good congregation. The conduct of my "family" was so exemplary that I felt less and less responsibility for them each Sunday. Truly it was a touching sight to see them in their accustomed places, to know that in the prayer-time so many heads were being bowed, and to hear the pennies drop from the hand of Miss Bings and two others into the contribution box; but the Great Adversary seizes us when we are most off our guard.

The cords and wires, which Seth used, to operate the "family," passed along under the flooring to Seth's pew in the rear of the

church. The room below was without a ceiling; and Seth had nailed a line of boards along the joists, to conceal these cords and wires. This defective construction was the immediate cause of the disaster and sad exposure that came.

One Sunday afternoon I proceeded to church, as usual. Often I had gone, in fear and trembling; but now the experiment had become such an assured success, that I felt perfect confidence in its working. I remember well, how, as I proceeded on my way over the hill and across the pasture lot, I felt no little elation at my own bold venture, and at Seth's mechanical skill. At times a question arose in my mind, as to the strict propriety, not to say honesty, of the plan; but I usually settled the debate by reflecting upon the fact, that nobody was the worse for the entrance of the strange people, and certainly some must be better; for the preaching was better, and there were more present to hear it.

I smiled with some pride, as I fancied Ty-

ler's open-eyed wonder and admiration, when he should be calmly informed of the success of the plan. I reflected that Tyler always was original in ideas, but never a man of action, like myself. To criticise was one thing ; to remedy was another. No, I was no Hamlet of indecision.

Thus I took sweet counsel with myself, that day, and reached the church, feeling much impressed with my Napoleonic boldness of plan and promptness of execution.

The service began, proceeded very satisfactorily, and was drawing to a close. Everything had gone well, and I was quite easy in mind ; much easier in mind than I would have been, could I have seen through the floor, and taken note of the three boys who came back, after going home from Sunday-school, to pick out better library books. Certainly I would have been anything but calm, if I could have seen the restless, inquisitive youngsters, prowling about, and poking into corners and out-of-the-way places. But I did not see that. I moved calmly on to my

fate. I passed from thirdly to fourthly, and then to fifthly and lastly ; and I was just clearing up the exact meaning of the much-discussed text about Melchisedec, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, when lo ! there was a faint sound, as of concealed machinery, and then — then, as I live, I saw various members of “the family” begin a series of most irregular actions, bowing, and again returning to a sitting posture, with a rapidity far greater than they ever did it before. They fairly snapped up and down, like knife-blades.

I glanced at Seth, and saw, in an instant, that he was ignorant of events. There he sat, in that half-dozing condition in which he was accustomed to take his brother’s sermons. No, he was innocent.

I stammered on for a moment, almost doubting my own eyes, and hoping that the invisible causes of these visible effects would speedily cease ; but it was not to be. Matters grew worse. Miss Bings, and the two others of her charitable class, began a series of arm movements, which were “swifter than

a weaver's shuttle." At that I paused, and my tongue "clave to the roof of my mouth." Then Grandfather Smallweed, over there in the corner, snapped up like a jack-in-the-box, and at once fell back into his seat. A second time, and a third, did that aged gentleman repeat his acrobatic performance, and each repetition was like a hammer blow on my heart.

Then, too, for the first time since I had projected this wretched plan of building up my congregation, my error — my sin! — came fully upon me.

With what terrific rapidity the human brain will work! Ah, how it flashed over whole fields of thought, between the sentences and words I was uttering, during that brief minute of desperate endeavor! Better a congregation of three people — of three living, moving people, able to go out of service at the proper time — than a houseful, and such a crash as this.

There was no more concealment. I stood as one paralyzed, and knew little of the startled and then angry faces of my congre-

gation. I was conscious, only, of my own inner torturing thoughts, and of those dreadful automatic creatures, now wrecking my fortunes with their every leap. As the masts of a stranded ship often doom her hopelessly, by wrenching her hull open, so these creatures, once my joy, were now each moment making my destruction more complete. Would they never stop? Alas! there was not much now to be gained by their cessation of activity. The mischief was done.

I waited a few minutes, then, with a bursting heart, gathered up my books and manuscript, and started toward the rear door. As I passed through, I saw Seth slip out at the front door; and, lingering for a moment in the doorway, I caught sight of the organist, as he grasped Miss Bings by her extremely slender waist, and hurled her into the aisle. Grandfather Smallweed I noticed also. He had just ceased his activity, having become, by the violence of his exertions, — a violence not anticipated in his construction, — a mass of hay and wig and missionary garments.

That was my last view of the interior of the little church at Hillside. The next day I departed from the town. My salary was overdue one quarter; but I followed the example of other defeated generals, and “negotiated from a distance.”

How my friend Tyler got on, I know not; I never saw him again. And whether or not he ever tried, in his parish, any such experiment as was tried in mine, I am uninformed. If he did, however, I trust that he did not bring into being such dangerous creatures as those upon whom I had so vainly leaned. I hope, for the good-will I bear him, that he never became the originator of “A Frankenstein Family.”

IV.

RETURNING from the misty region of fancy and fantasy, into which I confess to leading the way, let me now tell the more serious story set forth in this chapter; but let me continue to speak, somewhat in parables, mingling fact with fiction, yet preserving, always, the underlying reality; and may this narrative bring help and strength to younger members of my profession, in whose veins the current of life courses tumultuously, and whose keen nerves vibrate intensely, in response to every emotional appeal.

Only an hour ago a business man left me, here on the porch, saying with a sigh as he went, that he wished he lived the sheltered, untempted life of a clergyman. Little does that man realize the perils of the clerical life. Since the time of Saint Paul, who passed through "perils by land and perils by sea,"

ministers of the gospel, in the exercise of their peculiar calling, have stumbled into situations which imperilled their souls; and, passing through such experiences, as through a fiery furnace, have given devout thanks to God, whose strength upheld them, when their own strength was but weakness.

From the days of Adam and Eve, until now, men have committed some of their greatest follies, at the nod of a woman. The experience recorded in this story might happen to any minister, and has probably happened to many. It might happen once, and once only, to a sincere, sympathetic nature; but it could not happen twice, and leave that man blameless. If Samson is shorn of his strength by Delilah, it is only because he has dallied with temptation.

HERE ENDETH THE FIRST LESSON.

"O Woman! Woman! thou shouldst have few sins of thine own, to answer for, thou art the author of such a book of follies, in a man."

BULWER LYTTON.



THE evening service was over. The congregation was dispersing. The choir had departed. The organ postlude was the "Sanctus," from Gounod's "Communion." The tired young minister had passed out into the waiting-room. The Reverend Otis Erskine had "labored," in his preaching, that evening. The air had been close and hot; the people in the choir had been busy with some gossip; three young women had gone out, noisily, in the midst of the sermon; and the gas had flickered and hissed by turns. These irritating incidents had distracted him; he missed the supporting sympathy of his listeners; and "He drave heavily," through the

heads and sub-heads of his discourse, like Pharaoh through the Red Sea, when his chariot wheels had been removed.

When he re-entered the church, from the vestry-room, fatigue was visible in his face, and he received the greetings of his new parishioners with languor, and almost with indifference. Nobody mentioned the sermon; he had hoped that they would, to-night; he was eager to be told, and told convincingly, that the sermon was a good one. He knew it was not, yet wished to be told that it was; but no reference was made to it; instead, a gossiping woman invited him to tea; a young man, with sharp, critical eyes and a harsh voice, asked if the Revised Version did not give the text a different shade of meaning; and a coquettish, shallow young woman, with grimy gloves, offered herself as a teacher in the Sunday-school.

The young clergyman suppressed his impatience and irritation as well as he could, and replied courteously, if not quite kindly, to all. One after another they passed out, and

Otis Erskine was turning again toward the side-door, with a sigh of relief, when a soft feminine voice became audible, and a tastefully dressed woman came toward him, from the aisle. "May I introduce myself to my new pastor? I am Mrs. Lloyd; Mrs. Chalon-Lloyd."

There was a vibrant, appealing quality in her voice, which arrested his attention. Its soft modulations soothed his nerves. He moved at once toward her, and saw a slender, willowy figure, clad all in black, save for a few sprays of purple in her hat, and a bunch of violets at her breast. Her face was hidden by a veil, but her figure and her lithe movements suggested youth. As he took her well-gloved hand, it clung a moment to his, and she murmured sympathetically, "Oh, how exhausted you must be!" And her head tipped, like a dainty bird's, toward one side, and he could catch the gleam of bright eyes through her veil.

In an instant the young man felt the charm of her presence, and yielded himself to the

calming influence of her sympathy. Instinctively he felt that she would say more, and that what she would say would be agreeable. "I know it is a shame for me to keep you," she exclaimed, with a tremor of pity and self-reproach in her voice, "but I felt I must thank you for your beautiful, your magnificent sermon."

Otis knew, as well as he knew his own name, that the sermon was neither beautiful nor magnificent; but he felt a glow of pleasure, at her warm praise, and tried to believe it justified. At least the admiration was genuine; he was sure of that; although it might be misapplied; moreover, she might be correct; listeners often judged more justly than could a speaker; on the whole, as his eyes rested upon her graceful pliant figure, and his ears were soothed by her soft low voice, he more and more inclined to believe that she was correct; and he was glad that she had remained to say these kind words to him.

The grizzled old sexton was stumping noisily

about, putting out the lights; and Otis perceived, reluctantly, that the proper ending of this brief interview had come. A picture of his lonely bachelor fireside flashed across his mind, and he sighed, but spoke a few words of thanks, and resolutely took her hand to say good-night. She, however, withdrew her hand and said hurriedly, "There were one or two thoughts, exquisite thoughts, in your sermon, which gave me great comfort, Mr. Erskine. They impressed me deeply; and they will help me to bear my troubles more bravely."

She raised her veil daintily, with her thumb and forefinger, as she spoke, and touched a delicate lace handkerchief to her eyes.

Otis was moved by her evident feeling; he spoke a few words of sympathy, said that we all had our griefs, and was again about to take his leave; but she interrupted, in her former soft clear voice, now quite free from any tremor of grief, "And that profound thought about the immanence of God, which you expressed so forcibly; I wish I could see

it as clearly as you do ; I wish that in your multitude of duties you could — you could — find time — ”

She spoke earnestly, wistfully, leaning toward him ; and the young clergyman felt as if here and now was a repetition of the old Macedonian cry ; the cry of a timid, doubting soul, for some stronger soul to “ Come over and help ” her, and perhaps save her from the death of unbelief. Certainly he must heed that appeal ; he ought to heed it now ; on the instant ; as it came to him ; but, alas, there was the impatient old sexton, standing significantly by the door, under the one only lighted spray of gas-jets. Then he said hurriedly, “ Excuse me for a moment, and I will get my hat, and walk home with you ; we can talk more fully of this matter, on the way.” A minute later, the two passed out of the door together, and the Rev. Otis Erskine was advancing rapidly in his first great lesson, — a lesson which is nowhere set down in the curriculum of divinity schools.

The young clergyman was a man of high

purposes, and he possessed exceptional powers. A strain of hot Celtic blood in him gave fervor to his preaching, and he had a nice sense of literary proportion, which made the sentences of his sermons, almost of themselves, fall rhythmically and rhetorically from his pen; though, sometimes, his artistic delight in beauty led him astray from that simple clear statement of the truth, which the more commonplace hearers of his congregation desired.

His guardian, Mr. Moleshott, an old and trusted friend of his father, had suggested that he make of himself a journalist; but the young collegian, having fallen under the spell of a famous preacher, now dead, was deeply moved to preach. There was, too, with all his earnestness and loftiness of aim, an element of wilfulness, and undue self-confidence, which his guardian early detected; and, if the two had been more thrown together, Mr. Moleshott would have tried to correct this fault. Circumstances, however, kept them apart; Otis's remittances came regularly, during his

college and professional-school life, and sometimes a few words of advice came with them ; but the wise, kindly guardian offered few suggestions, knowing well that the young man was one who would learn his lessons of life only from experience.

Occasionally Otis had resolved to see more of his faithful friend, and at times had planned to visit him ; for the young fellow was grateful and conscientious ; but Mr. Moleshott lived in a distant city, and had no home, usually occupying rooms in some hotel, — though Otis was not certain whether he was a bachelor or a widower ; the result was that the mutual respect which existed between the two never had ripened into warm friendship ; and the young man had grown up in untrained freedom, which only his naturally noble and idealistic temper had prevented from lapsing into license.

The young clergyman left his sympathetic parishioner at her door, that evening, with a promise to call and see her before long. “ Come soon, Mr. Erskine,” she had urged,

laying her gloved hand coaxingly on his arm, and speaking in that ravishing flute-like voice, which charmed her listener. And, as Otis walked briskly homeward, he forgot that he was fatigued; indeed he was not fatigued, now, for Mrs. Challoner-Lloyd, like a chanting siren, had banished from him his weariness. He even began whistling, as he walked along under the stars, but checked himself suddenly, when he recognized the melody as a fragment from Offenbach, and recollected that the night was Sunday night, and that scarcely a half-hour before he had been leading a congregation in divine worship.

After an interim of two days, Otis made an afternoon call upon Mrs. Lloyd. She boarded in a plain dreary house, which, as he entered it, showed no sign of her brightening touch, in hall or stairway; but, mounting to the second story, Otis was ushered by the slatternly maid into a parlor which was clearly Mrs. Lloyd's exclusive possession. Heavy window hangings shut out much of the light; two or three rich dark rugs lay upon the

floor ; nooks and corners held half-concealed divans ; a tiny silver lamp hung from the ceiling, over the piano ; various quaint tables, covered with curios, were disposed about the room ; a faint Indian perfume tinged the air ; a half-size Venus of Milo peeped from behind a damask curtain, near the mantel ; and the walls held several large photographs, from Millet and Poussin, and an excellent copy, in color, of Lesueur's "The Three Muses." Owing to the dim light, the visitor could make out these various objects only imperfectly ; but the room exhaled an air, even an aroma, which suggested things Oriental and luxurious.

A door opened, and Mrs. Lloyd came in. Until now Otis had not seen her face ; and its delicate beauty quite justified what he had fancied it. She was dark, pale, with lustrous black eyes, and hair curving low over forehead and ears, Madonna-like, and singularly frank and confiding in her expression. Her mouth was a trifle large, but her white teeth gleamed behind her full red lips,

and her voice touched his ear as musically as ever. Whether she was twenty, or thirty years old, Otis had no idea; but her playful unrestraint was like that of a girl of eighteen, among her mates. After they had shaken hands, and she had motioned him to a seat, she raised her finger at him, smiling and admonitory; "I expected you yesterday;" she said; "my life is so dreary here, that days seem like years. It is a great change from my life in Washington." And she sighed, and swung her fan musingly.

Otis had entered the house, in full consciousness of his character of parish priest; and, despite his surprise at the soft languorous atmosphere of the room, he still retained it, in a measure. Yet he would have been content to have her simply go on, talking in her dreamy soothing tones, and let him rest his gaze on her fair face; but he felt that some response was expected of him. He roused himself, and replied, in his most serious tone, "We ought to have resources in ourselves, and not be too dependent on our environ-

ment." Then, recollecting the logical nature of their previous conversation, he continued, "Not only our despondency, but even our doubts, may be often banished, by losing ourselves in service for others."

Mrs. Challoner-Lloyd sprang lightly to her feet, laughed a merry, rippling laugh, and, to the young clergyman's great astonishment, exclaimed, "No, no, Mr. Preacher! this is n't a church, and to-day is n't Sunday; no more preaching, please! Here! let me sing you a song!"

She was wholly alive and alert, as she spoke; and, in a moment, she was seated at the piano. "It is a love of a thing. I heard it the night before I left Washington." And her white fingers skimmed like swallows over the keys, while Otis, amazed at the sudden transformation in her manner, sat in dumb wonder and submission.

The song was a dainty little idyl of Chaminade's; and Mrs. Lloyd's voice, a low mezzo, was very true, and wonderfully emotional; so that she seemed to be creating the music,

rather than merely rendering it ; and Otis, himself possessed of a fairly good voice, and always very responsive to the best music, felt himself slowly driven, or, rather, lured from his mood of amazement and almost of antagonism, as he yielded, more and more, to the magic influence of her tones. The theme of the song was the usual one, — love ; old, hackneyed ; but she sang it so intensely, so personally, that he felt the color coming to his face ; and he moved uneasily, with a self-consciousness which he could not conceal.

Mrs. Lloyd finished suddenly, rose from the piano, and began immediately an account of a tenor she had once heard in La Scala, at Milan ; but her interest in her story flagged, and she ended lamely, and then relapsed into silence, fanning herself restlessly with a sheet of music.

It was one of Otis Erskine's little vanities that he understood women. Most men cherish this fond belief ; and, like most men, he made the mistake of trying to weave into one harmonious pattern, a character which

was really only a disconnected succession of impulses. However, he was recalled from his profound attempts at synthesis by his sense of courtesy to his hostess. She too was silent, and had suddenly thrown off the responsibility of entertaining him. He roused himself and said, as people usually say, at such times, when they feel a dearth of ideas, "Won't you kindly sing something else?"

He hesitated as he spoke, feeling as he had felt at his first christening service, when he knew not how to hold the infant which was put into his arms; he was puzzled to know how to deal with this new variety of womankind; and he had now quite given over his pastoral dignity and superiority. He thought that if he could launch her again on the wings of song, he would have time to make her out, before she came again down to earth. At best, she seemed rather a volatile, shallow creature; but he wished to know her better, and perhaps he might make her more serious, and might even reconcile her to her life.

Mrs. Lloyd moved again to the piano ; this time slowly, reflectively. For a few moments she played chords, letting her beautiful eyes wander abstractedly over the room, and over her visitor, as unconcernedly as though he had been a table or a chair. Then she began the tragic "Liebes Tod," from Wagner's "Tristram and Isolde ;" and, as she sang, her nature seemed to expand, and the dim light of the little room seemed to deepen into gloom ; Otis felt himself dominated by the power of her sombre mood, and the very light of life waned within him. He was disarmed, as a critic, and his heart-strings seemed to throb beneath her tones, as did the steel wires of the piano, beneath her fingers. He saw that she had a depth of nature which he had not anticipated ; surely nobody could express, by mere accident, what she was so nobly expressing ; and he chided himself for thinking her shallow.

As the last solemn cadences died, Mrs. Lloyd leaned forward over the music-rack, and closed the song with sobs of unrestrained

emotion. Otis sat helpless; his sympathy went out warmly toward her, but he could find no words. In a few moments Mrs. Lloyd grew quiet; then she raised her fair beautiful face, and, with lashes still wet, she faltered, "What a mighty genius was Wagner! He touches the deepest notes of life."

Otis bowed in assent.

"And how truly does Browning say, in his 'Master Hugues,' that 'the rest may reason and welcome, 't is we musicians know.' Oh, Mr. Erskine, music is a revelation to me; it is my religion; and to think that Browning felt in the same way, why, it makes all his poetry doubly dear."

She spoke vehemently, clasping her hands, and turning her luminous eyes, like electric arcs, upon the young clergyman. Otis thrilled, under their compelling beauty, but roused himself to speak more calmly about Browning, and gradually led the conversation into quieter channels. He thanked her warmly for the pleasure she had given him, and asked if she would not play an accompaniment for

him, at some future time. "At some *future* time; not now." He repeated firmly; for she was eager to play it at once. Then he spoke of the need of a new pipe-organ, in his church; and he recalled the great organ at Freiburg, Germany, which he had once heard.

He spoke continuously, not allowing her to interrupt him; he knew that she had imperial power, for he had been just now dominated by it; but he exercised the masculine prerogative, and assumed a leadership which was only half justified. Finally, the conversation dropped to commonplace topics, and Otis prepared to leave. Mrs. Lloyd was herself now, calm, gentle, even tender, as he had seen her after the evening services. He felt the charm of her presence more than ever, and gladly would have stayed; but his watch warned him that he had already exceeded his limit of time, and he took her warm, clinging hand in his, and felt that they understood each other, like old friends. As he went down the stairs, she called to him, "I have a plan about that new church organ,

Mr. Erskine. I think I shall surprise you, before long." And with a merry laugh, which had not the slightest suggestion of the gloomy "Liebes Tod" in it, she smiled down upon him, over the stairway, and her gaze seemed almost to linger with him, as he glanced up at her, in closing the door.

The moment he stepped out upon the street, and felt the touch of busy practical human life, a transition of feeling swept over him. He was not quite satisfied with himself. He felt vexed; and yet, for what reason, he knew not. Had he stayed too long? Or had he allowed minutes to pass idly, in light talk and musical comment, which he should have employed in serious conversation on religious topics? He walked rapidly, compressing his lips, fixing his eyes upon the sidewalk; he could not account for his strange sense of delinquency. Then, as he tossed back his head impatiently, and drew in two or three deep breaths, and became conscious of the range and purity of the blue concave above him, he suddenly discovered that his dissatis-

faction with himself was rooted in his emotions, rather than in his conduct; he became conscious, for the first time, that in that dim little parlor his nobler emotions had been drugged by the sensuous surroundings; and he had lapsed into a feeling of pleased content, which was at least culpable self-indulgence, and might have become a dangerous laxity of mood. He saw, now, what a strong appeal to his quick senses that Oriental atmosphere had offered. He grew suddenly suspicious of the slender, soft-voiced, sympathetic woman. Who was she? Her black garb, — was it a sign of widowhood? What difference did that make to him? Enough that she was his parishioner. And he had called upon her; as he had a right to do; a “right” to do? Nay (with a frown), it was his *duty* to call. And the Rev. Otis Erskine dismissed the matter from his mind, and crossed the muddy street, in four athletic strides, to call upon a parishioner who kept the grocery store at the corner.

The next day he received, by a messenger,

at his study in the church, a dainty little note, with a faint odor of heliotrope permeating it. Mrs. Lloyd wished to know if he could recall where Browning spoke of the faults of the dead as "flowerets that were closed." She wrote that her own edition of Browning was not complete, and that perhaps it might be in some later edition.

Otis hurried to the door to detain the messenger ; but he had gone. Then he took down his own copy of Browning, complete, and wondered how much time he would need to carry it to Mrs. Lloyd's door. "Just to the door,—the outer door." He pondered ; then a slight flush overspread his face, and he put the volume and the note on the window-sill behind him, out of sight, and returned to his sermon, which was to be upon the text, "The refining-pot is for silver, and the furnace for gold ; but the Lord trieth the heart."

That was one of Otis's best sermons. So everybody said, when he preached it, the next Sunday morning. There was one part

about "The yearning of a beauty-loving soul for the breath of an undying benediction of the Spirit," which the parish clerk's wife thought very "spiritual;" but the parish clerk himself thought it rather "vague and flowery;" yet, taken as a whole, the sermon dealt with real life, in an unusually brilliant way.

The young preacher did not see Mrs. Lloyd in the congregation; he wondered if she were there. He hoped she was. He knew she would like that sermon; yes, and it would do her good. Indeed, — whisper it not! — it was written, in part, for her. He looked rather anxiously and hungrily for her, after the evening service, but she did not appear; and he went home, nervous and irritable.

A few days later, as he sat in his church-study, deep in a volume of Bossuet's sermons, a slight tinkle of the door-bell summoned him; he opened the door, and discovered Mrs. Lloyd.

He thought he had never seen her look more beautiful. As he opened the door, noiselessly, she stood in profile to him, gazing

up at a bird in a tree; at least there was a tree; and, perhaps, a bird. However, Mrs. Challoner-Lloyd's profile was an exquisite composition of curves; and surely that sweet woman was not to be blamed if she happened to know it; she turned, in a timid, startled way, as he spoke her name; and her lovely face—temptingly dim behind two veils, a white one within and a dark one outside it—turned confidently upon her rector.

The young man's heart grew tender toward her. "How beautiful God has made this fair creature!" he thought,—being considerably unaware of the border-line where the Creator's handiwork ends and a skilful woman's art begins.

"Mr. Erskine," she began, and Otis saw that she was much agitated, "Mr. Erskine, I have failed miserably in my dearly cherished plan." And she choked down a sob, and—and carefully took a seat with her back to the searching light of the window.

Otis was all interest, at once. Her fragmentary little sob made him forget his slight

distrust; and he urged her, gently, to tell him what plan she meant.

“Why, that plan about the new church-organ. You remember? I thought to surprise you. And now my plan has utterly failed.” Her voice had the same deep sad note in it that had thrilled him when she sang the “*Liebes Tod*.” He felt a sudden impulse to take her hand, her delicate right hand, — from which she had removed the glove, — as it lay in her lap, passive and white, contrasting very effectively with the deep black of her gown. But, instead, he pushed his chair hurriedly back, a foot or two, and asked her, in a more pastoral tone, to try to control herself, and explain.

She seemed to make a great effort to regain her composure; and presently began, in those soft deep-throated tones, which always held Otis, as if by magic, “I had set my heart on replacing that old organ with a new one; not that I care very much for the church,” — here a very slight toss of the head, — “but I care — I do care for —” here she stammered,

and a faint tinge of red overspread her face, in the prettiest fashion imaginable. "I care greatly for good music. And I had planned a grand concert, the hall decorated with flags, ice-cream served during the entr'acte, by ushers in Oriental costumes, and —" Here her voice, which had become quite animated, suddenly grew plaintive; and her face, which had lighted up with an almost childish delight in her plan, suddenly relapsed into sadness; and she continued, in an almost inaudible tone, "But it's no use. They would n't listen to my plan. They treated me very, very coldly; and I — well, I fear that we must give it all up." Here she deftly conveyed her dainty handkerchief up under her double veil, and staunched what seemed to her sympathetic listener a copious flow of tears.

He spoke with eagerness and sternness. "Mrs. Lloyd, tell me, I beg you, who were the persons that treated you so unkindly!"

For an instant she hesitated, and turned her beautiful face toward the window. Otis

momentarily forgot his question, as his eyes rested upon the exquisite silhouette of that lovely countenance. Then she repeated slowly, as if reluctant, and in a dream, "Mrs. Sloane, — Mrs. Bellwood, — Miss Martin, — Mrs. — oh, but it does n't matter. It is too painful to me."

She broke down, in deep sobs. Her sensitive nature seemed to have been cruelly shocked. She shuddered, and bowed her head like a wounded creature.

Otis Erskine rose firmly to his feet, and a look of stern determination settled over his face, "My dear Mrs. Lloyd, it does matter. Permit me to contradict you" (his voice had a very tender tone in it, like a father's, as he corrects a darling child); "it does seriously matter. I will see these women at once."

He was conscious of a momentary inclination to take her delicate hand and press it to his lips, — just to comfort her, of course; and to show that she had in him, a true friend; but he restrained himself.

She raised her tear-dimmed eyes wistfully

to him, and murmured, "I was never so treated before; and one of them a relative, too; a cousin of my husband."

Otis winced at that last word, "husband;" he had vaguely heard that she was married, and that her husband lived apart from her; but he had kept the thought as much as possible out of his mind. Now to have it thrust itself into the midst of this chivalrous mood, jarred upon him greatly; but he quickly forgot it, under the influence of those appealing eyes; and he spoke with prompt decision, "I will see these people at once, and tell them how unkind they have been." And he added, under his breath, out of his profound knowledge of the feminine heart, "How cruel women can be to one another! And she so sensitive, too!"

A few words of consolation and parting were said, and the two separated, in front of the church, and Otis went at once on his inquisitorial round.

He entered upon his several calls, with confidence; he had no doubt but that he

could easily overcome the slight reluctance and indifference which he anticipated in these women. Why, they were such warm friends of his ! They had offered him such kindness, and had promised such ready assistance, if ever he needed it. He felt sure that with only a word of suggestion from him, or a word, possibly, of pastoral admonition (here he drew himself up to his full manly height), they would at once lay aside their lethargy, and work hard for — for the good of the church ; yes, for the good of the church ; just as he was now working for it.

Two hours later, when he entered his own door, and flung himself, fatigued, into his big armchair, he admitted to himself that he had failed ; yet just why he had failed, he knew no better than when he left Mrs. Lloyd, at the church-study. He was a sadder, though not a wiser man. Each of his parishioners had received him, as usual, with a warm welcome, and each had grown instantly cool and reticent, as he stated the object of his errand. They had given no very clear objec-

tions to the plan of the concert, but had pleaded "engagements" in a half-hearted manner. He tried, again and again, to explain to himself the cause of his failure. Regarding Mrs. Sloane, he reflected that she cared nothing for music; she almost said so; Mrs. Bellwood had "feared that the season of the year was unfavorable;" Miss Martin had shrugged her thin shoulders, at the mention of Mrs. Lloyd's name, and Otis had thought he could detect a little envy or jealousy in her voice; which was natural, considering Miss Martin's paucity of physical charms.

Accordingly Otis very reluctantly gave up, for the present, the project of the concert; and, as he reflected, with keen regret, upon Mrs. Lloyd's distress, he decided to send her one or two cases of sickness among his parish poor; these, he was sure, would occupy her, and distract her, and would be an excellent outlet for that fine sympathy which was so evident in her every look and word.

A week and a fortnight passed; and Otis

called again upon Mrs. Lloyd. His call was natural, and almost inevitable. He wished to ask her about the families to whom he had sent her ; but, unfortunately, she had been very busy, she said, " With — with — oh, with many little duties and cares ;" and she had not yet seen the people ; but she would go ; yes, she would certainly go ; and, in the same breath, she asked Otis how he thought the closing stanza of " Childe Roland " should be rendered.

Otis read it to her ; and she was rapturous in her praise of his rendering ; said she had never yet heard it so clearly interpreted ; so Otis read one or two other obscure stanzas to her, and a part of " Saul," also ; and Mrs. Lloyd flashed upon him her lustrous response of feeling, and the young clergyman read as never before.

Then she happened to recollect a song, which she frankly asked his leave to sing. Her frankness was so childish, that it never seemed like boldness. And she sang Lassen's " Eyes so blue." Sang it with a throbbing

ecstatic emotion, which made Otis eager to sing some song in reply ; and he did so ; he sang Liszt's " *Du bist wie eine Blume ;*" and he was amazed at his own power. Next there was a duet ; something about " the pale moon," by Campana ; and Mrs. Lloyd played the accompaniment exquisitely, and swayed and sang, and looked like a radiant goddess, as the passion of song poured from her lips. Then there were other songs and duets ; and then — and then — Otis glanced at his watch, and found that he had stayed three hours, instead of the half-hour he had intended ; and, with an exclamation of surprise, he seized his hat.

He was vexed at himself ; " Music always absorbs me so ;" he said apologetically, and with a deep red in his fair face. Mrs. Lloyd sighed eloquently, and pressed his hand at parting, and begged him to come again.

Another week elapsed, and Otis gave himself, with earnestness, to his parish duties. As he recalled his recent visit, he felt a sense of self-condemnation which he could not ex-

plain, and which led him to seek the hardest tasks, and even to contemplate a season of fasting and special prayer. Strange, too, that he should feel so, for was not music a divine gift? And did it not often open to him his highest and most original lines of homiletical thought?

The young preacher could not unravel the tangled skein of his own experience; he found himself looking in at the music-stores, and wondering what good songs he might find there; wondering, also, if there were any new duets, suited to his voice and to a mezzo-soprano voice. Once he passed Mrs. Lloyd's house, and looked resolutely away from it. But why "resolutely"? Why "with an effort"? he plainly asked himself; but found no ready answer.

In his round of parochial duties, he always gave faithful attention to the poor and afflicted; and he was therefore much chagrined when he one day met old Tom Murch, a humble parishioner, and learned from him that his wife, a poor decrepit woman, hopelessly

afflicted with eczema, had looked in vain, during the past week, for a visit from her pastor. He was abashed. That was the very "case" which he had most desired Mrs. Lloyd to visit. Doubtless she had done so. "Had Tom heard his wife speak of the visit?" "A visit from a woman," — and Otis tried to describe Mrs. Lloyd, — "a slender, dark-haired, dark-eyed woman, dressed in black, with a sweet smile and soft voice?"

It was not a very intelligible description to Tom, and he thought that no such person had come.

"Very well, Tom!" — with a firm grasp of the hand, — "I think that she must have called. At any rate, I will myself see your wife, to-morrow." And Otis passed on, with a feeling of anxiety. What if Mrs. Lloyd had not called? Probably she had. Possibly she had not, because of some illness of her own. He was conscious of a little anxiety, at the thought.

He looked at his watch, and found that he had time to make a hasty inquiry at

Mrs. Lloyd's, before tea-time. He turned, and stopped short. Then he told himself that he had duties to the better class of sick people in his parish, quite as much as to the poorer class; and the next moment he was swinging along, with a manly stride, toward Mrs. Challoner-Lloyd's.

Mrs. Lloyd was not ill; her bright eyes and warm pressure of hand assured him that his beautiful parishioner was in the best of health.

"I called," he began, rather brusquely, looking away from her as he spoke, "to ask you how you found old Mrs. Murch. Did you carry her the jelly? And the beef-tea?"

He held his hat in his hand, and remained standing.

Mrs. Lloyd's smile faded slowly, but a mischievous twinkle lighted her eyes. "If you please, Mr. Parson," she said, with a mock courtesy, "will you lay aside your hat and sit a moment? Just long enough to hear a report from your committee?"

Otis smiled uneasily, and complied. Then

Mrs. Lloyd, with greater seriousness of manner, took a seat at the opposite side of the room. "Now I will tell you, Mr. Erskine," she began, smoothing her gown slowly, as she spoke, "about that visit. I went there, but—but I cannot go again; or to any other case like it. I cannot bear the sight of such a spectacle as I saw."

She spoke with increasing agitation, and put her dainty hands over her eyes, as if to shut out the horrible sight. Otis felt a momentary indignation, at this view of the case. Poor old Mrs. Murch was not a pleasing object, in her uncared-for condition; but she was one of God's creatures, and he could not quite forgive Mrs. Lloyd, for her almost cruel shrinking from her duty, however unpleasant. He looked steadily and reprovngly at her; he saw the slender, white, jewelled fingers, pressed tightly against the fair face, and noted how gracefully her shapely head was poised on her round shoulders. How deeply pained she was at even this recollection of the spectacle! How much more painful to her must

have been the actual sight of it! She was a very sensitive soul; perhaps he did not properly estimate her sensitiveness. The more he thought upon it, and the longer he gazed at her pliant figure, the less severe his judgment of her became. Her evident pain and regret disarmed him. He began to think that perhaps he had done wrong, in bringing her thus into contact with such rude harsh facts of life. He rose impulsively, and started toward her; then turned and paced the room; he paused at the window, and stood gazing out.

A moment later, he felt her light touch upon his arm, and, turning, met her nebulous eyes looking penitently into his. "I am sorry if I have disappointed you," she murmured; "I do so much desire your good opinion."

It was a charming frankness with which she confessed this. And a sudden resolution came into her manner, and she spoke bravely, "I will go again. I *will* do it, if you think I ought. You are so much wiser and better than I am."

Otis was touched by her confidence in his superior character; but he knew that she overestimated him. He felt that her surpassing beauty was itself superior to any poor plain loyalty to duty which he might possess. He quietly disengaged her hand from his arm, and, not quite knowing what to do with it, held it a moment, and said, with a friendly forgiving smile, “‘Being is more than doing;’ you know, as Emerson says.” Then he moved uneasily away from her, and said to himself that now was the time to go.

“Emerson wrote many mutually contradictory things;” remarked Mrs. Lloyd, brushing away a supposititious tear from each of her eyes, and then smiling radiantly upon him. “If only Emerson had possessed as deep a love of music as did Browning, I would follow his lead more confidently. Why, even Tennyson — by the bye, did you ever hear Hiller’s setting of Tennyson’s ‘Break, break’?” And she seated herself quickly at the piano, and began an exquisite melody, while Otis shifted uneasily from one foot to the other.

It was like the cadence of some magic spell. Otis knew that she was trying to atone to him, trying to soften his disapproval of her ; and it did not wholly displease him thus to be delicately placated. He stepped forward to turn the leaf for her, and she nodded gracefully in acknowledgment, but poured out her notes without pause, like a full-throated nightingale. He found himself catching the swing of the rhythm, and even humming a second part, to her first. More and more the music crept into his blood, as champagne creeps into the blood of coarser natures. "Try that last verse again!" she exclaimed, in a delighted whisper ; and he sang louder, and with more confidence. She swayed with the music like a reed on the river-bank, and leaned over at times so that she touched him ; but he shrank back ; as they ended, and she raised one hand to the music-rack, it rested against his ; it thrilled him ; he drew his own away.

She arose, and hurriedly brought a new sheet of music. "Here is a glorious aria,"

she said, and began the song of Delilah, in Saint-Saëns's biblical opera of that name. Her countenance, usually pale, grew flushed with the vigor of her playing and the intensity of her singing. "Ah, to the power of love surrender! Rise with me, to its heights of splendor! Its heights of splendor!" Otis felt his blood tingling in his veins under the spell of her passionate interpretation. He had never heard the air, and knew not its name; but there was a hidden fire in its current of melody, which stirred him in a strange, wild way. The rich sensuous voice of this beautiful woman thrilled him, and made his pulses leap, as they had never leaped before. He felt the intoxication of her presence, and his hand trembled as he leaned over and turned the pages of the music. Then leaped forth the final rapturous, triumphant strain; and then — then the singer sprang to her feet, her face glowing with intense passion, her eyes flashing like stars; the next instant Otis felt her soft arms clinging tightly around his neck, and felt her warm breath upon his

cheek, as she flung herself, in a paroxysm of emotion, upon him.

For a moment Otis stood as rigid as a marble statue; the fierce glow of youth, with its full tide of response, surged in his heart; but the self-control of his Puritan ancestry rose mightily to meet it. A moment of terrible conflict! An instant of wild impulse, fighting with amazement, honor, shame! Then, uttering a hoarse cry, like some savage animal, he flung the beautiful, delirious creature from him, and stood, victor, in an arena where few men could have conquered.

"How dare you?" he cried, in fierce condemnation, hating her, in her disordered beauty, yet trembling with fear of her. His blue eyes blazed with a wrath which was half terror; he stepped slowly backward, as if seeking instinctively to release himself from the still dangerous spell of her presence; as if fearing to turn aside his gaze from her, lest he release her from its subduing power. He reached for his hat, without taking his angry eyes from the crushed figure across the room.

His breath came in gasps. All his soul was in tumult. He opened the door, and in an instant went leaping down the stairs. He fled, as did Joseph, in Egypt, from the household of Potiphar. Another moment, and he had closed the outer door behind him, having, with God's help, "saved his soul alive."

Never had the young clergyman known such tumultuous emotions; and, as the ocean-levels toss restlessly, long after the storm has passed, thus the soul of Otis Erskine trembled and tossed, during many hours; then came greater calm; and his anger and terror gave place to quieter analysis. He hated her. He loathed her. And yet at times the vision of her loveliness, as she sat singing, exhaling music and romance, as a peerless rose exhales perfume, made him leap to his feet, and pace his narrow room, with set teeth. How beautiful she was! What noble emotions she could express, with that soft, rich voice! Surely she was not a wicked woman! She was rather a victim of the unrestrained artistic temperament. He condemned himself,

for having yielded so blindly to the wild fascination of her music; doubtless he had unwittingly fomented the emotions of her violent nature, instead of allaying them.

Thus the young minister tossed and tossed, like a ship amid the waves; but he was at firm anchor; he was safe. Safe, unless his tender, compassionate nature should treacherously undermine his fixity of purpose. Safe, unless — But what was that? The door-bell! The postman! His letters!

Among the letters, was one from his guardian. It ran as follows: “My dear Otis, I hear very good news of your work; a relative of mine, in your parish, writes me that you devote yourself to your various duties most zealously; this, of course, gives me great satisfaction. I am sure that you have earnestness and ability; try to gain wisdom, also, and at as low a cost as possible. I understand that my former wife, now divorced, is a member of your flock. She has wrecked my life. — Have a care that she does not wreck yours! I hear that she is as beautiful and fascinating

as ever. She has taken, I am told, the name of her uncle, and now calls herself Mrs. Challoner-Lloyd."

The next Sunday Otis went into the pulpit, with trembling body, and yet with a strange strength of spirit. He looked out upon his congregation, and missed one accustomed face; missed it, and was relieved by its absence. Miss Martin was there, however, sitting erect, with her high, thin shoulders squared to the front; and, in her Puritan austerity, she seemed almost beautiful to him. He read, for the first lesson, the sixty-sixth chapter of Isaiah; and the text of his sermon was from the sixteenth verse, "By fire will the Lord plead with all flesh." The people said that he preached with wonderful power; but they wondered why he closed his sermon with the words, "Here endeth the first lesson." They thought he did it by mistake. But he did not; he, at least, understood; and he was preaching to himself, more than to them, that day.

V.

I AM sometimes amused at the way in which elderly people, people as old as myself, and older, deceive themselves regarding the characteristics of old age. I call to mind one of my contemporaries, a lawyer here in the town, whose hair is quite as white as mine, and his step far more feeble, who repeatedly asserts that he is not an old man. And I know men and women who are dim of sight and dull of hearing, through physical decline, who yet declare vigorously that they are "just as young" as ever they were.

For my own part, I do not cherish any such illusions. I accept the fact of old age, submissively and even cheerfully, as being a part of God's eternal order; and I then set myself the resolution to find and enjoy the peculiar compensations of my years.

I admit to myself that I am an old man. If anything were needed to prove this to me,

I could find it in the re-reading of my old sermons. They seem so shallow, so limited, in their generalizations. Yet there are nuggets of golden truth in them; and all that I have done, since then, is to more earnestly reiterate what I then perceived, for the first time. The infinite love of God, and the infinite hunger of man for His love. That is about the sum of what I have been saying, these forty and more years. I say it now, as I said it at the beginning of my ministry; but now I can glance back and illustrate it, in scores of ways, from my own varied experience. If only I have helped men to put away their childish pagan notion of a misty but material deity, enthroned behind the clouds, and helped them to see and feel God, as he looks up to them from the heart of a flower, or speaks through the ringing tones of a brave reformer, or beams upon them from loving human eyes, if only I have helped my people to perceive the great and good God, in this throbbing daily life around them, then I shall be content.

Yes, I have seen revelations of God, in human life, in the plain lives of this parish, which were as direct and commanding as any that the past can show. The very vine, which entwines one side of this porch, recalls to me a loving life, that touches me, in the memory of it, as do certain of the psalms and portions of the prophets, in the Bible. That vine grew from a slip which I took from an old dismantled homestead, years ago, at what was then the extreme limit of the village.

WILLIS THE DREAMER.

“So much we miss,
If love is weak, so much we gain,
If love is strong, God thinks no pain
Too sharp or lasting to ordain
To teach us this.”

HELEN HUNT.



ONE of my first duties, in coming to my new parish, was to acquaint myself with my parishioners, in their homes; and I set about my calls with all a young minister's zeal. I had

been given a somewhat incomplete and illegible list of my people, and among these I selected, one afternoon, three or four names, of whom I was resolved to know more, before sunset.

About five o'clock, I found myself making my last call. It was at a small red farmhouse, just outside the village limits. The name, as it stood on my paper, was "Wills," or "Willis," I was not sure which; and, when I accosted a passer-by, he pointed out the house, and said that "Jim Willis" lived there; and then, as I nodded my thanks, he added carelessly, "Yes, Willis: Jim Willis; 'Willis the Dreamer,' folks mostly calls him."

The house was a small old "story-and-a-half" structure, covering considerable ground-space. It had once formed a part of a more extensive structure which had been destroyed by fire; as indicated by a dismantled cellar, with blackened stonework and a mass of charred beams. Such a ruin, remaining thus undisturbed, year after year, was a sad confession of failure; where a family permanently

retreats, from its larger occupancy, into more restricted quarters, the inference is inevitable that defeat has been accepted.

My first impressions of the place were peculiar ; as I approached it, I felt that the house itself was, in some way, almost uncanny. Perhaps it was the overarching elms in the doorway, and the mass of woodbine almost hiding its front ; or possibly the idle words of my informant had aroused my fancy ; but the house certainly had an individuality, a kind of repressed personality of its own ; and it seemed to shrink back behind its mantle of vines, as if sensitive, under my too bold scrutiny.

My sombre fancies speedily met a wholesome corrective ; for the young woman of thirty, who opened the door, was prose itself ; with sleeves rolled up, arms akimbo, an honest, sturdy, gray-eyed figure, she filled the doorway, and had, a little, the air of sentryship. However, when I told her frankly that I was the new minister, and that I had called to meet Mr. Willis, she relaxed her stern ex-

pression, and bade me enter, saying that she thought he would like to see me.

There was no hallway; the front door opened on a flight of stairs leading to the second story; a door, presumably of the kitchen, opened at the left; and, through a door at the right, she led me into a large sitting-room. The ceiling was low, and was grimy with age and with smoke from the huge fireplace, where a few embers were now smouldering. An open violin-case lay on a pine table, in the centre of the room. All the chairs were of ancient pattern, with wide spreading legs; and two of these sat facing the fireplace, one at either side. In one corner stood some book shelves, of rude construction, well filled with books.

Naturally my curiosity at once drew me to these. They comprised a few of the standard authors like Gibbon, Byron, and Miss Austen, in good bindings, with here and there a novel of the day, in paper covers. Lying upon the top, open, was a well-worn copy of "Well-wood on Dreams;" I glanced at it, with

some curiosity, and presently carried it across the room, and seated myself in one of the two chairs, to await my host. After reading casually a few minutes, I lost myself in moody contemplation of the huge fireplace. It was enormous, and even tomb-like; it aroused afresh my gloomy fancies. A few half-burnt logs were sullenly smouldering, and, from beneath the ashes, a single spark winked at me like a watch-dog's eye.

Presently, as my gaze wandered along the floor, it suddenly made me aware of a pair of feet, standing in a doorway, at the side of the room. Raising my eyes gradually, I saw, first, a pair of coarse worn trousers, reaching scantily to the ankles, then above these a brown checked shirt, and finally a man's face, calm, smiling, delicately featured, with a pair of mild blue eyes, abundant hair that was unacquainted with a comb, and a beard that was as wildly luxuriant as the woodbine on the front of the house.

As to the man's age, I could not satisfy myself. There was a sprinkling of gray, through

hair and beard, but the face bore the ruddy tint of youth, and there was a frank, boyish air about him, as he came toward me. He spoke never a word until he had slowly crossed the room, taken my hand in a dignified way, and motioned me to one of the chairs. "Keep that seat!" he said, in a quiet agreeable voice. "It is my wife's." And then he added, and a shadow crossed his face, "Though I cannot often induce her to occupy it."

A moment's pause, and he resumed hospitably, "I understand that you are the new minister. I am glad to welcome you. My wife, too, will be glad to see you." He rose, as he spoke, crossed over to another door, which was closed, near the one by which he had entered, and called gently, "Jane, dear, are you awake?" Evidently the reply was satisfactory, for he continued, "The new minister has called: do you feel well enough to see him to-day?"

So the wife was ill; perhaps a confirmed invalid. I noted the tenderness of the man's

tone, though I did not catch the woman's voice in reply; and I was a little disappointed, as my host returned to his seat, saying for his wife that she must deny herself the pleasure of seeing me that day. "She is rather timid about seeing strangers;" he added, apologetically; and there was a look in his eyes which seemed to imply more than his words expressed; so that my curiosity to see the invalid was increased.

Perhaps he thought he had said more than he ought; for he quickly changed his mood and his voice, asking, as he pointed to the book, lying on my lap, "Have you read it?" And, as I shook my head, he took the book, turned one or two pages, and read aloud, "Dreams are either the echoes of a life that has been, or the prophecies of a life that is to be." Then he looked at me intently and asked, "Do you believe that?"

For several moments I did not reply. We sat and looked questioningly at each other; he with undisguised confidence in my interest and sympathy, I with cautious perplexity,

trying to take the man's mental measure. He was older than I; was he more thoroughly trained? Better equipped philosophically? It was hard to classify this large, uncouth figure, with its gentle, dignified, almost womanly ways. I was on the point of giving an evasive answer, to draw him out further, when he dropped his eyes from my face, and said sadly and to himself, "He does not like to answer. *She* does not like to answer, either."

He paused, with a sigh. His own words seemed to depress him. I felt that he had some dark, sad secret in his life, and that it was somehow connected with his wife; or perhaps with somebody else, a sister or a mother; and I wondered who were the members of this strange household. There was an expression of confirmed disappointment and sadness upon the refined, sensitive face, which aroused my pity. I was willing to discuss the abstract problem of the nature of dreams, if he liked, but preferably I was eager to learn more about him; and, in the fulness of my sanguine youth, I hoped to be

able to help him bear the burden of his hidden woe.

Suddenly he took up again, rather abruptly, the broken thread of his conversation: "I believe that there is much to be learned from them. My wife and I often discuss them. She differs from me as to the continuity of a man's moral responsibility, as he passes into dream-land ; but then her dream-life is by no means as rich as my own. By the way, do you ever dream of flying ? "

He turned his calm blue eyes and smiling face toward me, as he spoke, and one would have thought, from the quiet confidence of his manner, that we had been old intimate friends. "No," said I, proud of my quickness in catching his meaning, "I don't dream of flying, but I sometimes dream of raising myself into the air by — by a strong will-effort, and — "

"Precisely!" he interrupted with eagerness; "that is what I mean. Wings are not essential; will is the motive-power. Now, the — "

Just then he must have thought that his wife called him ; for he stopped short, as if listening, excused himself hastily, — I was pleased at his watchfulness of her needs, — and went to the door of her room, took the door-knob in his hand as if going in, but changed his mind, and speaking through the closed door, asked gently, “Did you call me, my dear?” Then in a moment he repeated his question a little more loudly ; and apparently receiving no answer, he smiled and nodded his head in a satisfied way. “She is asleep ;” he said ; “she often takes a nap in her big armchair ; I am glad that she can get some rest to-day. She had a bad night ; but I am disappointed that she will not be able to see you.”

Then he went to the violin-case, — now closed, — opened it, and took out a violin. “If you don’t mind,” he said, “I will play a little. I don’t like to have my dear wife far away from me ; we have never been separated for a day since we were married. Even in our sleep we are together, for we both enter

the same realm of dreamland. Now, as you know —”

His fingers were busy with the pegs as he spoke, but he skilfully tuned the strings, as if unconscious of his own actions ; his face wore an air of lofty abstraction, and his eyes looked far away into space. “As you know,” he said, “the land of sleep is not a land at all, but a sea ; and the realm of dreams is a great dim beautiful watery world, where the dreamers disport themselves most happily ; while the heavy sleepers, whose sleep is only stupor, sink to the floor of that ocean, like water-logged hulks ; and there they lie as if dead.”

At this point, I moved a bit in my chair ; what queer fancies the man had ! and then I felt a little scornful of myself, for not being broad enough in my sympathies, to follow his fanciful ideas, without at once summoning the constable of the commonplace.

Perhaps he perceived the momentary lapse in my sympathy, slight as it was ; for his childlike gaze rested on me, a moment, and

the smile faded a little; and taking up the violin he said, very seriously, "You may not quite understand, but I will say it, nevertheless; I often use my violin to converse with my wife, when she is in the land — or, rather, in the sea — of dreams. When we both are asleep we can be there together; but when she goes there alone, I can reach her easily with my music. It is a kind of subtle telegraphy, I suppose. As you know, messages have already been sent, by scientific students, between two ships, miles apart, with no medium of transfer except the water or air." Then he added, meditatively, "I suppose it is in some such way as that."

At once he addressed himself to his playing, drew the bow across the strings with a firm yet delicate touch, and began a kind of music which I find myself unable to describe. It had no familiar airs in it; it seemed to me then — and does now, as I recall it — a kind of improvisation; but it was a wonderful maze of beautiful sounds. I almost forgot to analyze the man's fanciful

statement of his purpose in playing ; the reasonable suggestion came to me that all he meant, when his idea was put in more accurate speech, was that this exquisite music, falling upon the ear of his sleeping wife, — as it easily would, through the thin partition of the door, — would affect pleasantly her dreams ; and thus he would still be with her, in her land, — or, as he preferred to call it, sea — of dreams.

How long the exquisite music lasted I am unable to say ; probably ten or twenty minutes ; my sensibilities were so thrilled, my soul was so closely held in thrall, as if by a silver network spun by fairy hands, that I lost all idea of time, and recovered my consciousness of time and space only when my friend ended the music ; which he did rather abruptly, and at once returned the violin to its case. Then the rapt ecstatic expression left his face, and a warm human smile of satisfaction took its place ; he asked, as he again seated himself, “ You liked it ? I know you did, and I am very glad. I felt sure, from the first, that

we would harmonize with each other ;” then he added confidentially, “ And my dear delicate wife too ; you both will be harmonious, after you get to know each other.”

Then he sank down in his chair, in a comfortable way, and resumed the talk about dreams. He spoke very slowly, and with long pauses, hardly appearing, at times, to notice my presence. Sometimes his voice, always musical and refined, sank lower and lower, until I could not catch his words ; and then, stealing a glance across, I could see his lips forming words and sentences which were doubtless intelligible to him, but were inaudible to me. And another strange way he had : he often talked on and on, both of us looking absently at the curling smoke from the smouldering logs, and suddenly stopped ; and after a time, happening to turn my eyes casually toward him, I found his gaze fixed steadily on me ; fixed earnestly and as inquiringly as though he had just asked me a question, and was awaiting my reply. That occurred several times. However, his face always had

such a frank, kindly, and almost childlike air, that I grew not to mind his strange ways.

At length, after much unusual but interesting talk, he suddenly arose and put out his hand, saying regretfully, "I must ask you to excuse me for a few moments. It is nearly five o'clock. I will be with you again if you will wait."

I nodded assent, and he passed out of the room, through the doorway by which he had entered, closing the door after him. After a moment or two, I became aware of the existence of at least one other person beneath the roof; for a human voice, deep, intense, strongly masculine, fell upon my ears; and as I listened, the words were the words of prayer. Some one, a man it must be, in one of the adjoining rooms, was pouring out eager, anxious words of entreaty to Heaven. I could not distinguish enough to make out the full sentences, but I caught words and parts of phrases, all uttered in a fervid, passionate tone, which fell from the petitioner's lips in rhythmical cadences.

I was not averse to finding the custom of prayer, here beneath this roof, but there was a painful intensity and even violence in the tones, which disturbed me. I waited impatiently for my host to return, resolved to ask him plainly who his relative or friend was. But the door remained closed, and presently the voice softened into moans, and continued thus for some time.

I was becoming very restless, and debated opening the door and attempting to afford the unknown man some counsel and sympathy, as my profession might justify me in doing ; but my half-formed purpose was crushed by the plain, stern face of the soldierly serving-woman, who now stood like a sentinel in the outer doorway, and said firmly, “ Mr. Willis will be unable to see you again to-day ; he asks to be excused.”

Probably my host was engaged with the person whose voice had so stirred me. Had he a brother, or father? I did not know. And I took up my hat, in much perplexity of spirit, and left the house.

The taciturn domestic had pointed out to me a little by-path which I might take, and thus shorten my journey; this I followed: and as I threaded my way along its windings, I noticed, at my left, a mound of earth,—plainly a grave,—and at its head a neglected tombstone. It was no unusual sight; this kind of isolated family interment being a method very frequently followed in New England, a century ago. I was anxious to find out any fact that I could, regarding this strange family; and I stepped aside and spelled out the dim letters. “Here lies the body of Jane, wife of James Willis, died January 4, 18—.” The date was just twenty years back.

Whose grave was it? “Jane”? Was it the mother of the present strange occupant of the little red house, or could it be a former wife, with the same name as that of the present wife?

Mystified with these conjectures, I returned to my lodgings. However, I confided my reflections to nobody; for I felt that I had

been taken into the circle of this strange family, as few of the townspeople probably were taken. I doubted if many of the man's neighbors and friends could clearly understand him; and, much as I wished to solve the mystery of the impassioned prayer and the character of the invalid wife, I felt that the explanation ought to come, in due time, from the lips of my host, — himself as great a problem as any other of the hidden members of his family possibly could be.

More than a fortnight passed, before I again visited the little red house. During the interim I often found myself wondering about my friend and his family. I hoped that when I next called, the invalid wife — for I had concluded that she was an invalid — would be able to see me. Then, too, there was the mysterious worshipper, with his earnest and almost despairing prayers. I felt that he might be a brother — possibly a son — of my strange parishioner; but why kept so persistently in the background, I could not say.

Again, one afternoon, — the sky was dark and threatening, I remember, — I visited my friend. As I approached the house, taking the by-path which had been pointed out to me, I glanced aside at the low curve of the mound with its tottering headstone. A few yards beyond this, a cluster of wild-rose bushes drew my attention ; and I walked over and picked two or three half-opened buds. From that point I pushed straight across, through the tall clinging witch-grass, toward the house. This angle of approach brought me up to it on the north side. And as I came near, I noticed a feature of the house which gave me a start, and opened a new train of suggestions. On this north side was the room containing my friend's wife. He had spoken of her as "delicate," and had referred to her as "unable to see" me ; and now, as I glanced at the two windows of that room, I saw that they were heavily fastened ; broad wooden bars crossed each of them, and, so far as I could judge, without going nearer, the bars were strongly fastened by screws.

This seemed to clear up the mystery. The poor wife was indeed an invalid, but — if those strong wooden bars meant anything — they meant — yes, they meant that she was a mental invalid; she was insane; and she was forcibly restrained in her room. As I instinctively glanced at the room adjoining this one, the room whence the sounds of prayer had issued, there was nothing striking about it; there were not even blinds on the windows; the shades were partly pulled up, and one of the windows was half open.

There was nothing suggestive about this room, but the appearance of those strong shutters on the other one aroused my curiosity and my pity. I passed around the corner of the house, approached the front door, and knocked. At first there was no response; and after a few moments I knocked again, more loudly. Then, with a slight delay, the door was opened, a few inches, by the stern, military-looking domestic; and, recognizing me, she at once opened it widely, for me to enter.

Her face was even more grim and severe than on my previous visit. She seemed, for an instant, as I entered, on the point of saying something; but she checked herself, and motioned me to enter the large sitting-room, where I had previously met my friend. As I entered, I saw at once that various important changes had been made in the arrangement of the room, presumably to make space for a bed; which now stood at one side, near the door of the room, where—as it seemed to me—my friend's wife was forcibly confined. Upon this bed lay my friend himself, half-reclining, propped up on pillows, his delicate face more accentuated than ever, in its pink and white coloring. By his side lay his violin, and the bow was in his hand. He smiled in a glad way as I approached, but did not speak aloud. He motioned me to come to him, glanced at the door of his wife's room, put his finger on his lips, and whispered, "You will be quiet, I trust. She is not as well as usual to-day."

Then he noticed the little wild roses in my hand, and I was glad I had brought them. "Oh, the dear, dainty things!" he exclaimed. "My wife is very fond of roses." And he explained to me, when I told him where I had picked them, that he had been accustomed to bring a little nosegay from that bush, to his wife, every morning, during the season; but that he had been compelled to forego the pleasure, for several days past.

I nodded and smiled in assent as he talked; presently I took his hand; it was very hot; the man was himself seriously ill. In his anxiety for his wife he probably overlooked his own illness; but that he was seriously sick I could not doubt, as I noted his high temperature, his quickened pulse, and his excited manner. I took a seat by his bedside and asked, in a whisper, following his lead, "Can I do anything for her?" And I ventured to add, "Or for you?"

"Thank you! Thank you kindly!" he replied, still speaking very softly, and glancing anxiously at his wife's room. "There

is nothing to be done. She is in danger of pneumonia, I fear. As for me, I am a little worn out from sitting up with her at night; three nights in succession now. I don't believe much in drugs; do you? I know that music is one of the best remedies for her." And he took up his violin hurriedly, as if he had neglected his duty, and began playing.

Again the same kind of dainty, caressing improvisation that I had heard before. He seemed too feeble to sit up in bed; but, as he played, his touch became firmer, and he swayed from side to side with intense absorption in his weird music. His eyes were closed, and the color alternately flamed and faded in his thin cheeks, as his playing varied from gay to grave. At times there were suggestions of familiar melodies, one or two from a stringed quartette of Haydn's; and once he played half through the old ballad, "Kathleen Mavourneen," but ran off, in the middle, into variations of his own.

Presently his playing grew weaker, and he

finally ceased, sinking back on his pillows, with eyes still closed ; he was exhausted. At that moment, quite at my wit's end as to what I ought to do, I heard a step behind me, and the stern-faced domestic stood near, bearing a glass of water ; this she placed on a table at the bedside. Quiet as were her movements, they did not escape the ear of the sick man. He opened his eyes, smiled, and whispered, "Thank you! she will be very thankful for the water ; she is weak, and the fever makes her very thirsty." Then he closed his eyes wearily.

The girl paused a moment, as if in uncertainty, and then moved slowly and softly out of the room, beckoning me, as she did so, to follow her. As soon as we were outside the door, she turned to me, and spoke in a low tone, yet with more evidence of excitement than I had before seen in her. "He is very sick. The doctor says that he has pneumonia, and may not recover."

The news was not wholly a surprise, for I had guessed as much, from my friend's gen-

eral appearance. Then, naturally, my anxiety transferred itself to his poor afflicted wife. What would she do, if her devoted, watchful husband were taken from her? I expressed my anxiety at once. "What will his poor wife do, if — if —"

I hesitated over the dread sentence; but the sudden look of surprise on the girl's face made me forget my hesitation, and I gazed at her with a surprise as great as her own.

"Why, have n't you heard? Has n't anybody told you? Did you suppose —" And she paused, in great uneasiness and confusion.

"Hear what? Know what?" I exclaimed in utter perplexity.

"Why, did you really think —" And she tossed up one hand with a gesture of amazement, the other having reached out and clutched the banisters. An expression of profound sorrow swept over the stern face, transforming it into tenderness and rugged beauty. Then she mastered herself, for she was a woman of great firmness of character, and at once spoke clearly and rapidly, in short,

breathless sentences. "The poor dear man has n't any wife. She was burned in the fire that consumed the main part of the house, twenty long years ago. That loss was what unsettled his mind. He thinks she is in that room. It was her little sitting-room. We had to lock it up ; he went in once, just after the fire, and it made him wild to see all her things there. So we locked it, and nailed it up ; and the windows too. Why, sir, that room has n't been opened for nearly twenty years. He is quieter now, after these years, but you have seen how he acts about it even now. He imagines all kinds of things. It nearly breaks my heart, sir, sometimes, to hear the man talk to her, and call her by the old pet names, and fancy that she answers him. Whenever he is ill, too, he thinks it is his wife who is the sick one."

As she poured out this astounding revelation, I stood aghast ; the very foundations of things seemed tottering. I seemed to feel the floor sinking beneath me. This was an explanation for which I had not been prepared.

Then the awful pathos of the man's broken life swept over me, and I groaned aloud.

The faithful woman before me, transfigured by her loyal devotion into a very angel of light, had paused for a moment, and I saw her hand trembling as if with palsy. She was evidently about to explain more, when from within the sitting-room suddenly came the sound of a voice,—the same voice that I had heard in the adjoining room, once before, now, as then, engaged in prayer. I looked mutely at the woman, and she nodded sadly, with tears in her eyes, and whispered, "He's praying now."

"Who?" I ejaculated.

"Why, my poor master, of course. He often breaks out into prayer, especially when he has been excited by some idea about his wife. He is very anxious about her now."

Instinctively I bowed my head, as the burning words of entreaty poured out of the poor stricken mind of the man. I doubt not that it was true prayer, and dear to God.

As soon as the deep entreating voice — so different from my friend's usual soft tones — died away, I entered the room. He had sunk back exhausted on his pillows. As I drew near, he heard me, raised his tender, kindly eyes to mine, and said, stretching his hand toward the table at his side, "She enjoyed the water very much, thank you."

I looked at the glass. It was empty. He had drunk it himself. And yet, as I gazed, with deepest sympathy, at the pathetic blue eyes turned up toward me, so calm, so intelligent, I could hardly grasp the full truth of the sad situation.

The end was nearer than I thought. As I looked silently down at the delicate outlines of his white face, I became aware of a change that was taking place. The outlines seemed to stand out in clearer and sharper relief; the color retreated to the hollows of his face; and slight involuntary spasms shot over him at intervals.

He must have been conscious of his own waning vital force; for he suddenly roused

himself, with convulsive energy. "She is growing weaker;" he burst out, his deep sad delusion about his wife's identity and his own still holding sway in his confused mind: "Weaker and weaker! Something must be done. Oh, my violin! Where is—" And he groped after it, though it lay close beside him. I think his eyesight had failed him. "Oh, here it is!" And he struggled forward, sat up, and began to play with feverish energy. At first came his old weird improvisations; then he glided into "Auld Robin Gray," and "My wife's a winsome wee thing;" then a snatch of "Mary of the Wild Moor;" and I never heard, before or since, the dear old love-songs played with such passionate beauty. Presently I noted a soft step, close at hand, and knew that the faithful helper of this sad household was behind me. In a moment a suppressed sob near me confirmed my thought.

Suddenly, in the midst of the playing, he stopped short and fell backward. I started to arrange his pillows, but he pushed my hand

violently aside, and his hot, feverish lips tried to speak. I could just catch a word here and there, "She is — needs — help;" and his sightless eyes strained themselves wildly toward the door. Then he paused, caught one or two long breaths, or tried to, and again he struggled to a sitting position, and began the first notes of the Wedding March from *Lo-hengrin*; but, when half through it, his lips, which had been tightly pressed together, as if in supreme effort, suddenly burst open, and he gasped out, "God! My wife! — the door! — open!" And the music clashed and jangled, and he sank back, the violin falling with a crash to the floor.

That was the end. The end of — what shall I say? The end of his earthly life, it certainly was, but more truly to him it was the end of a long sad dream; a dream within "life's fitful dream." The awakening had come. Often, since, I have felt that same truth, as I have seen a human life flicker and fade, like a spark in a burnt-out ember; but never have I felt it more strongly than when, in my

young manhood, I stood by the bedside of that man. And there was even a deep joy in my heart; for, after many years of patient, trustful waiting outside a closed door, that door had been suddenly opened to him, and together those loving hearts faced the great immortal life.

VI.

MUCH as an elderly person may enjoy the vivacious atmosphere of younger people, there are times when the companionship of his contemporaries meets a greater need in his nature. Young minds furnish a cheering stimulus, which is good for him, and he returns it with wise and sympathetic counsel; but he frequently finds himself wearied by their activity, and unable to keep their pace. Thus there is a deep satisfaction in sitting with a person of equal years, a person who neither gives nor expects much, but is content with that silent companionship which needs little outward expression.

This is the basis of the friendship which has grown up between Professor A—— and myself. He is my superior in age by two years; for thirty years he was a parish minister, and for ten years a professor in a theological

school. Together we sit, by the hour, on the parsonage porch, and discuss politics and theology and the lighter literature of the day.

I knew Professor A—— many years ago ; but until recently our lives had not come very closely in touch. Nevertheless I find that he is familiar with a good deal of my early life, especially the rather eventful part comprised in those early and shifting pastorate, with which I have dealt, in this volume.


One mild summer afternoon, as we were sipping the “afternoon tea” which my faithful housekeeper had brought out to us, on the porch, I chanced to refer to some incidents of my pastorate at W——. My friend, who is a rather taciturn man, said little in response, but seemed more than ordinarily amused ; seemed, indeed, more amused than my narration justified ; and when he rose to depart, he asked if old Michael, my gardener, might not come over to his house that evening, to fetch a package of manuscript which he wished me to read.

I was of course quite agreeable, although a little puzzled by his manner. That evening I sent rheumatic old Michael over, and he returned with a manuscript, which I opened with some curiosity. My curiosity was transformed to surprise and then to amusement, as I proceeded in my investigation. On the top was a brief letter to me, personally, explaining that the enclosed story was written by my friend, years before ; it was made up out of letters which had come to him from a cousin, who lived in my parish of W——. He had written out the story, with some additions and alterations, and for some reason had laid it by ; and then, in the pressure of other duties, had forgotten it. My reminiscences had recalled the sketch to him, and he now transferred it to me, with the hope that I might be amused to “see myself as others had seen me.” Without further preface or apology, I lay before the reader this effort of my friend. I have altered the story but slightly, and only in such ways as my friend would sanction.

WANTED — A YOUNG MINISTER.

“ Whose fulfilment has ever come nigh the glorious greatness of his yet never-balked youth ? ”

LETTERS OF JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

“  END us a *young* man ! ” wrote the chairman of the parish committee. The kindly Bishop smiled a wise episcopal smile, and sent Sidney Livingstone.

“ He is young, enthusiastic, devout, an excellent scholar ; ” ran the Bishop’s letter. The good man might have gone more into details, but his time and effort would have been wasted. The astute committee read the word “ young,” and were happy ; did not analyze the adjective “ enthusiastic,” paused not to consider what other adjectives might have been added to the list. “ Young ! ” Yes, the retiring incumbent was old, infirm, lethargic, out of touch with youth ; cared more for his rare varieties of sweet peas and

pansies, than for human buds and blossoms. The incoming man must be young, active, enthusiastic. All pastoral faults seemed to them comprised in the fact of old age — itself a fault; all virtues seemed included in youth — buoyant, confident, hopeful.

Sidney Livingstone alighted from the train, and a group of young people, eager, admiring, greeted him. No white tie or high waistcoat; a soft gray suit fitted him faultlessly; a light-red cravat matched blond curling hair and blue eyes. Immaculate, handsome, smiling, courteous, he “tipped” the asthmatic old station-master (who nearly strangled at such an unheard-of act), pointed out his two sole-leather trunks, an embossed leather dressing-case, a nickel-tipped hat-box, and stood, like a gracious prince, amid the greetings and blushes and flutterings of his new friends.

Certainly he was young, athletic, manly. The young girls added “and distinguished,” and adored him. The young men approved his sinewy form, square shoulders, frank smile, and voted him “a capital fellow.”

Sidney played baseball well. He sent for rackets and balls, and taught the rustic youths and maidens the delights of tennis. He also sang well, especially love-songs ; and he read Browning divinely. On the wall of his room hung a pair of foils and masks, and a set of boxing gloves ; likewise a college “shingle” from Amherst, and a suspicious beer-mug from Heidelberg ; these closed and sealed any question as to his scholarship. Perhaps the foils and the Heidelberg mug, and a scar on the forehead, were all to be classed together ; the young men wondered and admired, the maidens shuddered and sighed ; but Sidney never referred to the matter.

The young minister was shy, though few persons discovered it ; he covered it well by tact, even by effusiveness. His laughing eyes grew properly serious as he talked farm-talk with the farmers, and trade with the business men. They quickly discovered that he knew nothing whatever about these matters ; but his attentions pleased, and they all liked him. He did better with the younger people ; or-

ganized at once a Lend-a-Hand Club, a Young People's Religious Guild, a branch of King's Daughters, a mother's meeting, a Browning Club, a music club, and a class in political economy.

He set about his parish calls promptly ; and his cheery ways won him golden opinions, on every side. He gave most amusing accounts of college pranks, and described in glowing colors such wonders of foreign life and landscape as he had seen. To the sick people he read Milton and Shakespeare ; and they looked upon his animated young face, and enjoyed — seeing him enjoy it. To certain deaf old women he sang ballads and hymns, in a resonant baritone voice, which pierced their silent solitude most agreeably. He put new life into the Sunday-school, long since considered moribund. Under the inspiration of his vitalizing presence it increased rapidly in numbers ; reached and held, even in May, the large attendance of the pre-Christmas season. The “ young ladies' class,” which he started and taught, became too large

for the vestry, and adjourned to the church auditorium. An interest in the missionary journeys of Saint Paul was aroused in these fluttering young hearts, which would have gladdened the great apostle's soul; and so suddenly aroused, too! That was the marvel of it.

The new young minister did not neglect the weightier matters of his profession. It was extremely interesting and edifying to see him in the pulpit. He was animated, stimulating. People remained awake who had never remained awake before; deaf people heard who had before sat in patient resignation. He led the congregational singing admirably; held the congregation twice, after services, fifteen minutes, practising new English hymns. Extremely important, this new English music! And several roast joints were overdone, in several ovens, and Deacon Slocomb's sorrel "mar'" walked solemnly home when the town clock struck twelve, and the deacon, wife, and three children toiled through two miles of sand after her.

Sidney read the Scriptures with a force and vivacity that was illuminating. He read with the emphasis in new places, bringing out unexpected meanings. His pronunciations, too, were often new and enlightening; the elders missed their old friend Záccheus (accent on the first syllable), and were compelled to take as a substitute Zacchéus (accent on the second syllable). Also, he said "Siloam" instead of "Silóam." Still, these changes showed deep learning, and must be accepted. Sidney interlined his Scripture reading with sundry citations "from the Hebrew," and corrections "from the original Greek." Quite unintelligible to the people in the pews, but showing clearly to all men — especially to any strangers, or visitors from sister churches — how profound a scholar the new minister was; and the pews were proud and happy. The new minister's sermons — well, it was generally conceded that they were "fine efforts." They contained much valuable information, and were delivered without manuscript; Sidney was sure this was

the only way to preach effectively. He introduced many quotations, both prose and poetry; and these were given with a great deal of fire. As to doctrine, the older people listened critically, for several Sundays, but Sidney was entirely "sound" on the few doctrines which he introduced. He did not emphasize doctrines; he preached "practical sermons." So he told people. He was especially proud of his sermon on "The things that are seen are temporal, and the things that are unseen are eternal." Also one on "The Past, Present, and Future of Religion." He always tried to educate, in his discourses. He made it a rule to use some new word or pronunciation each Sunday. Thus the farmers and mechanics had such useful words as "vagaries" and "schedule" (pronounced shed-ule) and "conténts" and "eleemosynary" added to their working vocabularies; very useful in planting corn and making horseshoes.

Sidney was especially strong on descriptions; he grew really eloquent as he pictured a Sabbath on the Sea of Galilee, or the suffer-

ings of the Israelites in Egyptian bondage. Also, references to the latest discoveries in science were frequent; these pleased, while they slightly bewildered the plain people in the pews, many of whom had secret doubts about the earth's being round, and always consulted the Farmers' Almanac about the weather.

The young minister was much sought, at weddings. He found no marriage ceremony in the books which quite suited him, and arranged one of his own, with several charming symbolic acts in it, and two excellent selections of poetry. The first time he used it, however, a superannuated Methodist local preacher, who was present, dryly pointed out to him that he had omitted to declare the two "man and wife." This was at once rectified, and the omission corrected in the beautiful service.

Altogether, the parish committee were well satisfied with their pastor, and extremely well satisfied with themselves for making such a choice. Everybody pronounced him "smart;"

and the acme of all compliments was expressed in the phrase, falling often from the lips of admirers, "He doesn't seem a bit like a minister." This phrase greatly pleased Sidney himself. To be sure, when stern old Deacon Stebbins died, his angular widow sent over for the prosy old cultivator of sweet peas, at Bristowe, whither he had retired, and asked him to come and hold the funeral service. And when "Sister Chapin," mother of four grown-up sons, fell dangerously ill, she was asked if Mr. Livingstone should be sent for; but that motherly soul smiled, between her racking coughs, and exclaimed, "Bless the dear boy's heart, no! Send for our old pastor, please!" Once, when Sidney was summoned to the Widow Draper's little vine-clad cottage, whither poor Tommy Draper, limp and lifeless, had just been borne, taken from the river-bed, he could scarcely find a word to say; he stammered out that he was "glad to see her," and that "we must all die;" and then, after a long constrained pause, taking his hat, he "hoped that he

should see her at church on Sunday." And she, poor, desperate little white-faced mother, with the flour of her baking still on her hands, and eyes dim with tears, eager to have him kneel down beside that child's dear dead body, and speak to the Father the hunger and hope that sobbed in her anguished heart.

However, Sidney Livingstone was a great success. There could be no reasonable doubt of it. Why, the young people followed him as if he were the Pied Piper. The good, wise bishop, however, after receiving, one day, a blotted and laborious letter, wrote Sidney that he was glad to hear of his success, and hoped he would not overlook the older people of the parish.

The mere suggestion of a neglect of such a duty made Sidney angry, for a moment ; for a moment only ; then he recalled the baseball and tennis, and resolved to organize a " walking club." He remembered his walking club in Germany. It would be an excellent plan ; it should include old and young. That meddling old bishop ! To imply that he was

forgetful of the older people! So the walking club was formed; had a constitution and by-laws, thirty members, and a green and yellow ribbon to distinguish the club-walkers from merely ordinary walkers. The membership part was easy. The young people, so soon as Sidney began, "I wish you would join —" smiled and nodded and said "Yes," without waiting to hear what the thing was which they were to join. "Mr. Livingstone has such a taking way with him;" they all said. A good many older ones joined also; not that they grasped the full significance of their step, but they were cheerfully ready to join almost anything; "joining" meant a change, of some sort, from the bare monotony of their daily routine.

So they joined, old and young; and Sidney, with a student's cap jauntily poised on his handsome head, and an alpenstock in his hand, led the walking club forth on its first tour. His heart was light; he was glad to be of service to his dear people in any capacity whatsoever. Not only would he give

them spiritual strength from the pulpit, but he would help them to gain physical strength ; the two should go together ; and physical strength comes only by exercise.

So, to obtain exercise, three women put off their washing, two postponed their house-cleaning, four omitted baking, one man closed his blacksmith's shop, and several farmers left their haying.

Sidney felt a deep joy at thus being able to meet the needs of his parishioners ; and he gayly led the troop, over hill and dale, through field and forest, eight miles across country, intending to make a circuit and complete a journey of about fifteen miles.

Alas ! A distance which was a trifle to his sturdy frame was an experience of distress and despair for many who followed in his train. Puffing, perspiring, they dropped by the way as did the smitten crusaders, returning from the Holy City. Some toiled painfully back, by the shortest route ; some were given "a lift," by passing friends and neighbors, in wagons ; and old Betsey Drew, who

had not stirred from her fireside for six years, but had started hopefully upon this deadly excursion, poor Betsey was brought home, a total wreck, by pitying friends, in a hay-cart, and did not leave her bed again until the following spring.

Still, the new minister was a great success. That was incontestable. Were not three entire pews newly rented? And were not two disaffected families, who had voted the former incumbent "slow," now seen (with their four daughters) regularly at church? Sidney always emphasized strongly, and with all the sternness which was the right of a minister of the gospel, the duty of attending divine service. Of course, a cynically minded person might have questioned the entire disinterestedness of his motives, in thus exhorting his young people to be "constant;" but the young apostle was wholly unconseious of any element of self-interest in his appeals, if any such existed.

To him "church" was indeed the most important feature of life. Why not, then, to

them also? To be sure, when he was away on his summer vacation at Bar Harbor, he rarely attended Sunday services ; but then, of course, he was resting ; rest is change ; rest for him, therefore, was to be found in not doing, on Sunday, what he did through the greater part of the year. So Sidney swung in the hammock on the piazza, and looked calmly up from Daudet or Spielhagen, in the original, to see the people go out to church.

Sidney enjoyed his work. He felt sure that he had chosen wisely in selecting the ministry. His happiness in his work was ample proof of the wisdom of his choice. He was glad, too, to find how good people were ; he had never before realized this so fully. His sermons were very optimistic. He rarely spoke of immortality, because heaven seemed such a remote country ; he believed in its existence, somewhere ; believed that most people were going there, sometime ; they ought to, they were so kind and good ; but earth was too happy a place to need any suggestion of a happier.

Thus time flowed on, like a smooth sunlit stream, with never a rapid, or fall, or fleck of foam on its serene surface. One month glided by, and people had not ceased to praise "our minister." Three months passed, and less was said, but all admired the talented young man and enjoyed his buoyant presence. Six months elapsed, and hesitating conditional clauses began to be whispered among the approbations; or, at times, plain sturdy "buts" sprang up amid the praises, like damaging "black-eyed Susans" in a mowing field.

These changes in opinion and sentiment were wholly unnoticed and unknown, by the earnest active young man, who was very zealous to serve his people in every possible way.

How fortunate it was that he had so good a knowledge of music! He could greatly improve the work of the choir. How glad the people would be to have the church music improved! Music was worship. It was an offering to God; it should be the best possible; so he preached an eloquent sermon on music; quoted David, Palestrina, Saint Greg-

ory of Tours, and Haweis, and incidentally wrote a letter to the parish committee, suggesting that the present aged organist be discharged, and a new one hired in Clinton, and that Miss Hawkes, leading "treble," be asked to allow her younger sister to sing the solos.

Indeed! Old Amasa Dexter, the organist, had never played a sonata of Mendelssohn's or a fugue of Bach's, but in early life he had acted as accompanist at the Cornish music festival; that was lasting fame. Again, his hearing was not as keen as formerly, but he had raised the money, \$1,000, which purchased the church organ, thirty years before. Again, he had not brought into the choir one new piece of music in ten years; but his father was the minister who founded the church and occupied the pulpit for twenty-seven years.

Thus it will be seen that old Amasa Dexter was no mushroom, to be easily plucked up and tossed aside; Amasa had roots; roots are hidden away out of sight, but they are tenacious. Sidney found them so.

Miss Angelina Hawkes also had roots ; she might sing through her nose, and drop from the key, but she “gave her services” (an impregnable position) ; and her father was the heaviest rent-payer in the society ; and when she learned that the new minister had implied that her “solo work” was not all that could be desired, she tossed her head, and grew pale with wrath and hate.

Poor guileless Sidney fondly awaited the changes which would follow from his suggestions ; but the changes came not ; only a brief dry remark from a member of the committee, to the effect that nothing would be done about the matter at present ; no further explanation ; no recounting the angry discussion in the committee-meeting ; no hint of the spiteful comments passed from lip to lip through the parish. Of all this tempest the zealous young minister remained blissfully ignorant.

The failure of the committee to take up his suggestion made him indignant, — for twenty-four hours ; then he forgot it, in his eager-

ness to reform the sewing circle. Sidney had no sense of proportion: a trivial thing, if desired by him, became all-important; life's prizes were all of one size and value.

So he tried to reform the sewing circle. It met fortnightly; eleven elderly women, who, in an afternoon, by dint of steady use of fingers and tongues, made three ill-fitting shirts "for the poor;" garments so rude and clumsy that every woman present would have scorned to have them in her own family wardrobe.

This was the field upon which Sidney's reforming eye rested. He understood that it was a "charitable society;" but he overlooked the fact that its greatest charity was towards its own members; it saved their lives from stagnation; and when he suggested that they use sewing-machines, and make twenty garments instead of three, sharp-nosed Mrs. Pettigrew fixed her chilling gray eyes upon him, and informed him that "the sewing circle had a venerable past of twoscore years, and had never worked with sewing-machines

before, and" (with a snap of the gray eyes) "did not propose to begin now."

Then Sidney, shy, wounded, but hopeful, offered to come in and read to the members as they worked. "Thank you very much, Mr. Livingstone, but it would distract the ladies from their work."

The fact was that they did n't wish to lose their opportunity for gossip; and as for having their pastor present, why, he was the very person they wished to gossip about.

Concerning all the secret unrest and cap-tious criticism roused by this little change of amenities, the young minister was entirely in the dark. When he went in, at times, for a few minutes, to visit the sewing circle, faces and voices were all friendly; but, his back turned, the tongues flew like shuttles, weaving gossip and adverse opinion and harmful antagonism. These worthy women would have clothed him if naked, or fed him if hungry, or visited him if in prison; but they would not, could not control their restless, wagging tongues. They had regard for him,

but their regard was not sufficient to make them deny themselves the pleasure of their thoughtless, heedless gossip.

Thus the gradual change of equilibrium in parish sentiment went silently on, and Sidney never dreamed of the magnitude of the change. Another incident which lost him sympathy was the advice which he gave excitable, hysterical, sentimental young Mrs. Andrews. She came to him, sighing, sobbing, and poured out her tale of family woes: "Husband unkind, exacting, penurious, unendurable." The inexperienced young minister, touched by the pathos in the large, black eyes, and by the tears trickling down the rosy cheeks, and by the quivering of the red, curved lips, grew angry at her hard lot, and conceded that if she were cruelly treated, as she affirmed, she had a right to separate from her husband.

The next day Sidney received a letter from her which turned him pale with astonishment.

"Mr. Livingstone! Do you call yourself a minister of the gospel, and go about breaking up families? Where, in the Holy Bible, do

you find warrant for tearing asunder those whom God hath joined together? My dear husband loves me with his whole heart. We shall give up our pew in church."

"Woman's way!" Another family of malcontents, and the pew rentals lowered. Sidney read and re-read the curt epistle. His heart sank within him. He had only given the weeping woman sympathy; he had not really advised separation; this was the result. Sidney felt what the wild creature feels as it hears the hunters close around it, and sees the converging fences of the trap on either side, and suspects the pitfalls in front.

A month went by, and his face did not wear, as formerly, its careless, happy smile. Still, his nature was an elastic one, and there was in his strong young body much of "the mere joy of living." At one moment he felt alone in the world; then he reacted, and believed that the disaffection in the parish had been overstated. Nearly a year had gone by, and not half of his beneficent plans for the church and the village had been accomplished.

His warm heart went out in love and tenderness to his people, as a whole ; yet sometimes when he thought of one or another individual, he felt an icy chill of repulsion at his heart.

Then came the funeral of old Seth Coulter. Seth was not old, barely forty ; but he was old in vice and degradation ; the sot of the village. He was not one of Sidney's parishioners, but two of his sisters were. His wife had a dread of what the old Calvinistic incumbent of the West Church might say, and Sidney was asked to conduct the funeral service. Sidney knew little about the man, except that he had often seen him drunk and disorderly on the street. He went to the appointed place, resolved to say nothing about eternal punishment ; he would leave the wretched sinner with his Maker. "Of course," reflected the frank, high-minded young minister, "I cannot speak of him as if he had led an honest, noble life ; to do so would be wrong ; it would lower the standard of village morality ; it would set a bad example to the young people of the town."

So he followed this course ; said that men were all weak ; spoke of the dangers of self-righteous judgment ; dwelt upon the all-embracing love of the Father ; ended by quoting, " Let him that is without sin cast the first stone ; " and came away feeling that he had touched the matter very tenderly, and hoped he had given comfort to the family.

But he had n't. Two days after the funeral he called upon the widow. She was a tired little woman, beaten into a fragment of humanity by her brutal husband. She seemed constrained, said nothing for several minutes, then burst into tears and exclaimed, " Oh, I know you meant well, Mr. Livingstone, I am sure you meant well." Then she hurriedly left the room.

Sidney went out, much perplexed. A vague suspicion haunted his soul. He felt depressed, but could not say why. Near the house he met one of the sisters ; he bowed ; and she, without responding, passed loftily by, head in air, virtuous condemnation written on her face, in large letters.

It was a surprise, a blow to Sidney. He knew now that he must have injured somebody's feelings. He tried to recall exactly what he had said at the funeral. So far as he could remember, it was all moderate, sympathetic. He had not said one-half, one-tenth of what he might truthfully have said.

The mail, that evening, brought him a letter; it was from the two sisters, signed by both; it bore signs of joint production. It ran thus:—

MR. LIVINGSTONE, Sir, — You are a cold, cruel hypocrite, a blot upon your noble profession. We are sorry that we allowed you to officiate at the funeral of our dear, departed brother. You ought to go back to the Theological School and learn how to conduct funerals, or back to your old Heidelberg, and stay there.

A—— B——.

X—— Y——.

That letter was hard reading for the young minister. It was not only a blow to his manly self-respect, but it was a wound to his tender soul. He had felt, as he had stood there,

a profound pity for that degraded sot, and a genuine sympathy for the family. He had felt himself the champion of the weak and afflicted, against the strong tide of condemning public opinion ; and to have the positions altered so suddenly, to find himself thrown so quickly from the position of plaintiff's attorney into the position of a prisoner in the dock — this was something to make his head reel and his heart despair.

In all this period of *Sturm und Drang* there was one source of comfort and strength for Sidney, without which he might have felt wholly alone and utterly discouraged. Not alone was he upheld by his trust in God and his own honesty of purpose, but a very human atmosphere of support gathered about him. It came from the presence of Esther Merri-
vale, who lived with her invalid mother, a widow, at the end of the village street. She had not stood among those who effusively welcomed him at the railway station. She came regularly to church ; sat in an obscure, inexpensive side pew ; appeared once in the

“Young Ladies’ Class” in Sunday-school; once only. Said nothing; the young teacher thought he saw, twice, a smile of amusement — or could it be scorn? — upon her serious care-worn young face. Once, in church, when he was delivering that excellent sermon of his on “Salvation through Sorrow,” she was clearly restless and inattentive.

However, she interested him more and more; he enjoyed talking with her, or to her; he did most of the talking; she generally listened, and looked calmly at him out of her great, steady, luminous eyes, and he grew eloquent under their stimulus. The little she said seemed to take root in his mind. One day, when he was speaking eagerly about the changes which he had planned for the parish, she stopped him and asked slowly, “Are you quite sure, Mr. Livingstone, that people desire the truth, and welcome improvements?”

That was a serious check to his thought. He revolved the idea much in his mind.

Esther was extremely musical, and played

accompaniments for Sidney's Scotch ballads admirably ; the young minister had not visited the widow Merrivale's house twice, before every soul in the parish knew it ; and knew, better than did Sidney himself, the exact ratio of increase in the visits.

Thus Esther Merrivale became the brightest strand in the web of Sidney Livingstone's experience. He enjoyed her society, respected her opinion, feared her disapproval, and honestly believed that he visited her merely to have his songs accompanied.

Surely Sidney had received enough hard lessons to have quenched the spirit of a less ardent reformer ; but the young minister was deeply interested in his work ; gave himself wholly to it ; it had always been his way to either take no interest whatever in a subject, or to pour his whole strength into it. He did nothing by halves. The Bishop had written that he was "earnest," but had not said that he was discreet or tactful.

The one great change which Sydney had long cherished, in secret, was born in his

heart the first Sunday when he had entered the church ; it was — the tearing down of the bare, ugly old meeting-house, and the building a new and more ecclesiastical edifice. Such a change seemed to him in every way desirable. The unhappy affair of the funeral service was long since over, and forgotten — by Sidney. His elastic nature made him oblivious of past mistakes and hopeful of future successes. He obtained plans and estimates from a former college-mate, now an architect, and he invited, with gladness of heart and innocence of soul, a score or two of his leading parishioners to meet him in the vestry.

Then he unfolded his plans, casually spoke of the present edifice as bare and unattractive ; referred to small but beautiful church edifices which he had seen in and near Boston and New York ; appealed to Deacon Sumner as to the exact date of the building of the present structure ; received no reply, and fatuously fancied that the deacon had not heard his question ; then expressed his in-

ability to preach, as he would like, in so high a pulpit. Mrs. Sparhawk here arose and went out; Sidney thought she was ill; the door slammed violently behind her; Sidney fancied that the wind blew it.

Thus the ardent young man laid his plans before the meeting, and sat down, wiping his brow, and feeling that he had convinced these people of the need of a new building; at least he was sure that he had shown them proof of his business capacity, which he feared they mistrusted.

There was a dead silence. Sidney had been so occupied with freeing his own mind, that he had not observed the faces around him, to discover what was passing in their minds. Now he scrutinized them, and every eye was averted from him. Amasa Dexter and Miss Hawkes had not been invited, but they were there; sat together; Sidney wondered if they were pew owners; they were; they knew it, if Sidney did not.

Now a settee creaked, as Mr. Sampson, the short, snuffy, cynical old postmaster,

arose. It was not his sixty years that made his hands tremble, as they turned and twisted over each other. "We have just listened to a remarkable speech," said he; and his voice quavered, though not with age. "This young man" (Sidney started at so unusual and disrespectful a reference to himself) "has told us many useful things." Here his voice grew steadier, and a satirical smile crept over his brown little face; the relief of the smile seemed to take away the nervous pressure on his voice, as one disease often weakens another. "He has told us what an ugly tumble-down church this is, which we have worshipped in nigh onto forty year, some on us. He has told us what fine churches they have down to Boston and New York; and he has told us" (here his keen black eyes were bent maliciously upon the young minister) "how much better he could preach in another pulpit. Now, brethren and sisters, I think he would do well to leave this poor old tumble-down church, and get one of those

fine churches near Boston or New York, and have the right kind of pulpit put into it, so that he can preach better there than he has been preaching here for the last six months." Then Mr. Sampson sat down, and looked disinterestedly at the Scripture motto, "My peace I give unto you," nailed over the library door.

A sound of whispered approval ran through the room, like the buzz of angry bees. Sidney felt a horrible sinking of the heart; next an angry flush swept over his face; then a deadly sickening sense of shame enveloped him. His face grew pale, he clutched the back of the settee, and braced himself to meet his condemnation.

Miss Hawkes arose. Her face flamed. She had not forgotten. It was her turn now. And she pointed her lean finger straight at the shrinking, outraged young fellow, and spoke harshly and hotly, "There he sits; the minister of the Gospel, who spends his time singing love-songs, and playing tennis; and he thinks he can run every-

thing and everybody in this church; but let me tell him that he isn't the captain here; he is only a passenger; this church went on well, long before he was born, and it will go on well again — when he leaves it."

Her wrath was great; she hissed out the last sentence and sat down; and Amasa Dexter, beside her, chuckled and muttered, "Good! good!" Amasa was deaf, but he could hear that.

Sidney fairly gasped for breath. The brutality of these attacks overwhelmed him. He could understand that they might not approve or like him; but the animal-like ferocity of these speeches was crushing to him, a sensitive, courteous, delicate nature. He resolved to say a word in his own defence. He rose, and attempted to speak, but his mouth was so dry that he could not articulate; and, with a great groan of horror and despair, which touched some of those less obdurate hearts, he seized his hat and rushed from the vestry, and in the silence and solitude of his room he took refuge. So these were the people

who had seemed to him kind and good. For these people he had prayed, and labored, and felt a sympathy which at times had mounted to a passion. Sidney's heart was filled with wretchedness and woe, and the tears trickled through his fingers upon the little round table, where his aching head rested.

This was practically the end of Sidney's pastorate. The annual parish meeting was held a fortnight later. Sidney "exchanged," on both the intervening Sundays. He was too sincere and too broken in spirit, to face those people from the sacred desk.

The parish meeting held a stormy session. Sidney had some warm friends, but he had many bitter enemies; and the meeting voted to "allow him to resign."

This formality was accomplished in due time, and Sidney stood, one day not long after, at the railway station, surrounded by the sole-leather trunks, dressing-case, and hat-box, and was not at all as saddened as he had expected to be.

There was no group of young men and

maidens to say farewell ; the young minister had a line or two on his face which had not been there a year before ; had also in his breast-pocket an unstamped letter, in a feminine hand, which warmed his heart. He smiled grimly, and repeated, from Browning's "Patriot," —

"Thus I entered Brescia, and thus I go."

The parish committee wrote a letter to the bishop. In it they said, —

"Please send us an elderly man ; one with experience ; a man with family preferred."

And the good bishop smiled a wise episcopal smile, and sent them a man who had labored in the vineyard twenty years, and had a wife (his third) and eight children.

VII.

WHEN I was a much younger man than I now am, I rebelled stoutly against what we clergymen call "clerical isolation." Every man, lay and clerical, knows what I mean. The world, in general, gives itself to understand that it is to put on its best, its smoothest, its saintliest face, in the presence of "the minister."

Formerly I rebelled against this; but now I have come to accept it, and, partially disregarding it, to dwell more upon the compensations which offset it. It may be true, in a sense, that a minister is an isolated man, but in another sense, he is a member of all classes of society; his white tie — especially when reinforced by white hairs — makes him independent of all social classifications, real or artificial. It is thus a source of great pleasure to him, that he can meet men and women

as individuals, belonging, himself, to no group, and yet to all members of all groups, if he can serve them. If sometimes his intimate friends smile in a compassionate way, and tell him that he never sees men as they really are, he can reply that although he probably sees a different side from that shown and seen in the hard business world, yet the side he sees is quite as real as that other. And as to seeing men "wholly," who does that, except God? Yes, who of us sees and knows himself, even, as God sees and knows him? Not one.

There is one member of the community, with whom the clergyman, in certain of the saddest of his duties, is frequently associated. Indeed, this man might almost be called the clergyman's "shadow."


Of course I mean — the undertaker; a man whom few in the community understand, or care to understand. Of him I speak, from long experience, and with profound sympathy, in this last sketch of my little volume. In closing the book with

such a theme, I am complying with the law of unity; for, as I asked your sympathy, at the beginning, for a misunderstood dog, so now, at the end, I ask it for a misunderstood man.

THE RIVAL UNDERTAKERS.

“The world is enlarged for us, not by new objects, but by finding more affinities in those we already have.”

RALPH WALDO EMERSON.

N the doorway of his office stood old Job Graves. A funeral procession passed. It was a funeral of Job's; not “Job's funeral,” mark you, but “A funeral of Job's;” one of many which had fallen to his charge; for Job was an undertaker. Over the doorway was his weather-beaten sign, in dingy white paint; on the large front window was inscribed “Coffin Warerooms;” and within the window lay a funeral wreath of wax flowers, a silver coffin-plate, and a little white coffin, — Hope and Despair in one pathetic group.

Job stood in the doorway, and his thin body scarcely filled his threadbare coat. He leaned against the door-post, absently took off his rusty silk hat, and slowly wiped, first, his thin white face, and then his bald shiny head, with his red handkerchief. The face was worn, bleak, with tufts of white beard scattered among the hollows and under the shrunken jaw, like patches of snow among the hollows of a wind-swept wintry hillside.

Job's gaze rested upon the old hearse, — his hearse, and the black horses, — his horses, and the black-garbed driver, — his assistant ; the whole equipment, so to speak, the work of his hands ; it seemed good in his sight ; and a feeble sense of joy in its ownership struggled faintly with the habitual melancholy of the undertaker's heart.

A slight elevation of the hearse-driver's eyebrows asked of Job, "Is all as it should be?" And the master's answering nod returned approval. Then Job's thin frame straightened a little, his right hand paused with red handkerchief in air, and a slight

frown gathered on his pale face ; for he beheld, across the street, through the gaps in the passing carriages, two other men standing in a doorway. They also were viewing the procession, and critically ; over that doorway was the sign, in bright gold letters, "Daver, Funeral Director ;" on the half-drawn olive shade of the broad window was the same legend, adorned with many scrolls and flutings. Within the window rested a large silver plate, reading, in delicate script, "C. A. Daver & Co., Funeral Directors." Nothing more ; no suggestive signs of the craft, no symbols of mortality. Rather a scrupulous simplicity ; almost an admonitory simplicity ; as one should say, "Look over there, at those barbaric emblems of woe, and then behold the refined taste, the chaste quality, of this 'establishment.'"

That is what Daver & Co. maintained, an "Establishment ;" old Job Graves was only a plain "Undertaker," and had "Coffin Ware-rooms ;" Daver and Co. were "Funeral Directors," and maintained an "Establishment for Funeral Furnishings."

There stood Daver, himself, in the doorway, with his assistant beside him. A short stout man he was, with round ruddy face, thin grayish hair and beard, his red good-natured face beaming through the hairy haze like the sun's disk through a dissolving fog.

Daver's glance always rested lightly, soothingly on all objects ; yet few interesting things escaped his notice ; his critical eye now passed over the procession, and over Job Graves ; and he said, in a low tone, with a skilful suppression of facial muscles acquired by long experience, and amounting almost to ventriloquism, "That hearse, Jim ! What an ark !"

Then the assistant, sharply, "It ought to be burned. I wouldn't be seen in it for all I'm worth." As he spoke thus enigmatically, he winked in a facetious way at the driver of the hearse, and the greeting was reciprocated ; evidently there were underground sympathies existent, between the two, while outer rivalries were maintained.

"Strange," continued Daver, reflectively, "how little self-respect and pride people

have about such things. It's hard to elevate the popular taste. Ten years we've tried it, here ; not much improvement." Then he yawned, and returned a politic salute to the one timidly offered by a driver on the third carriage. The man had driven for him scores of times, and often for Job Graves, his rival. Daver's disapproval was limited to the hearse ; not an intense antagonism, but a pained disapproval. Daver never antagonized anybody, took the world's blows on a slanting buckler ; but he was very clear as to which prizes he sought.

His answering salute to the driver could hardly have been sworn to, as such, in a court of law ; a slight corrugation of the forehead, passing down into a brief closing of the eyes, and ending in an almost imperceptible sinking of the chin, and it was done, and no outsider the wiser. Then Daver yawned again, and retired, with his assistant, into the office ; and Job Graves, with the slightest possible sigh of relief, put on his rusty hat, adjusted the striped cotton neckerchief around his

old-fashioned high stock, climbed stiffly into his old chaise at the curbstone, and took up his position at the rear of the procession.

That was Job's custom, to ride alone, at the end of the line. He had maintained this custom through the funerals of forty years; having inherited it with other customs from his father, undertaker before him. Whereas Daver, with his other "progressive" ideas, had introduced the custom of leading the line; which he did, very grandly, in a luxurious coupé, with gold lettering. This innovation was accomplished gradually, discreetly. The first year the new "Funeral Director" moved up behind the clergyman's carriage; the next year he pushed up past the clergyman, and followed the hearse; the third year he pushed past the hearse, and led the line, in a very impressive way. This position he had ever since maintained, despite the concerted attempt, in the fourth year, of seven clergymen — one a Doctor of Divinity — to retire him.

It was the ages-long struggle between the

New and the Old, this rivalry across the street. Elsewhere it is "hand-work versus steam," or "Puritan against Cavalier," or "stratified rock at war with the leaf of a book;" here it was "caskets against coffins," with all that these implied. Always, however, the iron rule is — with occasional exceptions — New conquers, modified by Old. So it was here; and Job saw the evil day afar off — as many a conservative sees it — but held, with might, and largely with conscience, to the old methods, to the accustomed ways.

Job knew nothing of "caskets;" he made "coffins;" made them in that back-shop; his father had made them there, and was buried in one of his own fashioning. So would Job be buried. "Am I better than my fathers?" Many a time, as a child, Job had taken his afternoon nap in a coffin in the back-shop, and nobody harmed, no human life the shorter for it. Years afterward, when his wife died, Job knew that life's noon had passed. After that day the cemetery

seemed different to him ; seemed more personally related to him ; even attractive. He understood now why people lingered there, after a burial, and resorted there at other times. He bought an iron settee and placed it on his lot, close by his wife's grave ; he might feel like using it.

Then the two boys went ; one to lie beside his mother ; a boy of ten ; diphtheria ; Job had a "case" of it, and might have slighted his dread duties ; but Job never shirked his "work ;" and the boy at home died. The other, a wild lad of eighteen, wandered into the "far country," to be swallowed up in distance and degradation, and perhaps despair. Then Job selected cedar, and made his own coffin ; twilight was about him ; darkness would follow ; then the coffin would be needed ; coffins and darkness come together ; best to have all things ready ; Job was a "fore-handed" man, the people said.

The two undertakers differed widely, in many ways. They met death weekly, daily ; but they met it differently. In Daver's bluff

abounding presence, death seemed minimized; he reduced it to an incident; but mourners found it loom crushingly, after his departure. Whereas Job knew it as a visitation, and his presence counselled patience, submission.

Therefore people who desired "cheerful funerals" — those chimeras — sought Daver's tactful offices; but sensitive people and those whose fathers and mothers had been buried by Job's father, turned to Job's father's son, in their hour of need, and their hearts' wounds were touched most gently.

As Job and Daver differed in their attitudes toward the dead, so also they differed in their relations with the living. When coarse careless people made stupid jests about death and the duties of his vocation, Job listened in silence and passed on in pity. Stupidity is piteous. But Daver always laughed louder than the jester, — and hated him in his heart, and grimly wondered when he might be privileged to look at him through a casket-lid.

Daver & Co., Funeral Directors, knew

nothing of coffins. They had, however, "A choice line of caskets." "This way, please," with bows and smiles, and eager hands rubbed over each other; and you followed master or assistant into the mysterious rear-room, and you chose from "A fine stock, sir! A high grade, madame!" Occasionally, after careful scrutiny of the buyer, and skilful measuring of the degree of his grief, it was — "Extra quality, sir! Anybody using one of these never will use any other as long as he lives." But that facetious sentence was venturesome; it was forbidden to the assistant, and was rarely indulged in by Daver himself. The main object was that some selection should be made, from the "caskets in plain black, brown, magenta or white;" or from "caskets in plush, black, brown, magenta or white."

Daver & Co. sold many, of both kinds. Job likewise sold many, of the one simple unvarying pattern which he had learned to make, taught by his father. Before Daver & Co. appeared, Job, by working hard, met the entire demand; after the "Funeral Di-

rector's " coming, trade fell off. Then Job Graves waited patiently ; " This is not a business that you can push," he said. But in a year or two custom increased, up to the old amount, and Job was fairly busy ; his products were soon taken ; " Supply creates demand ; " (an economic law, we are told ; — of almost suicidal application, here).

The two undertakers differed widely, in their conduct of funeral services. Job did as his father had done ; not because that way was best, but because it was his father's way. This rule of conduct became more absolute with him each year. Now that wife and sons were gone, he had no future ; he had " the imagination of regret, having lost the imagination of hope." The star of success, before him beckoned no longer ; the star of experience, from behind, illumined his sad path. Job had given up the idealism of purpose for his sons ; he lived by the idealism of example, from his father. Often he brooded anxiously about that absent lad, but his anxiety was not suspected by others ; an

undertaker is not supposed to have griefs of his own.

In the house of mourning Job came and went silently, unnoticed. At the funeral service he effaced himself, coming forward, at the close, with resolute step and squeaky boots, from some retreat, to state, in a plain sturdy sentence, "There will now be a chance for every one to look at the body." After this old-fashioned invitation had been accepted, and the general farewell had been taken, the company separated, like a chemical solution, into liquids and solids; liquids, — casual friends, — flowing off homeward; solids, — mourning friends, — remaining. Then Job, reading laboriously through heavy gold-bowed spectacles, like a clerk casting up accounts, called, in a firm tone, the mourners, in fours, from the residuary group, in the order of their grief.

Here there were nice shades of distinction, as in arranging guests at a court-dinner; but Job was not only an undertaker of experience, he was an old resident; he knew all the cir-

cles within circles ; knew not only how deep each person's sorrow should be, but about how deep it really was. And he always spoke with such quiet confidence, that even if he sometimes gave a "second cousin on the maternal side" precedence over a "nephew on the paternal side," he was so convincing, that a listener might sometimes forget his own identity, or even become a trifle confused regarding his own sex.

Daver & Co. discarded many of these "old-fashioned ideas." They did away with the sombre bunch of crape on the door-bell ; and placed there, instead, "floral emblems." By these, skilfully graduated, were expressed more distinctions than the "seven ages" of Shakespeare. A cluster of white buds, or one of full-blown flowers, — white or yellow, or white and red mixed, — these, tied with ribbons, — white, violet or black, — could become a language of flowers so plain that he who ran might read ; (though, of course, he would not run, in passing a house adorned with such a symbol). In addition to the

flowers, a few brown autumn leaves were considered significant; or a wisp of brown grass was added; this last symbolized the "bearded grain" of the poet.

During the funeral service itself Daver & Co. were very much in evidence, either master or assistant; on important occasions, — great crises of the profession, so to speak, — both were present; very much so; active, cheerful, inspiring all with confidence. And whereas Job Graves humbly wore around his stock a kerchief with a little "color," in deference to the "parson," Daver & Co. boldly wore immaculate white ties; and, with their faultless black clothes, might be easily mistaken for clergymen; thus the service often took on the high quality of a solemn festival.

But Daver and his assistant were not clergymen; Daver had no foolish deference for "the cloth." During a funeral service he tried, visibly, even conspicuously, to be patient with the readings and prayers; it was customary to have these; therefore he must acquiesce; and, always smiling, he utilized

the time in scanning the faces of the people present, to detect signs of physical weakening, and, possibly, of mortal disease. Such people, — or, better, their near relatives, — he afterward spoke to with especial consideration.

After "the church" had been tolerated for a half-hour, the great moment arrived; the moment which — Daver knew — alone justified this coming together; and the skilful man's heart beat high with pride as he stood by the casket and offered for inspection the unequalled quality of his "work," a triumph of funereal art.

Sometimes a family was strangely unappreciative; gave orders to keep the casket closed. Then you should have seen the "Funeral Director." Then, only, did his unvarying "immortelle" smile vanish. "Do I understand, my dear sir" (in a measured, circumflex tone), "that the casket is to remain closed?"

"Yes."

"Very good, sir! It shall so be, sir."

And no human ear, however keen, could detect that pity and scorn in his voice, which the Omniscient One knew was in his heart.

Thus Daver & Co., zealous, in season and out of season, grew and prospered. They had now become the "City Undertakers;" and their doings were often chronicled in the papers. "How did they become the City Undertakers?" Who knows? This is an age of wires; both "overhead" and "underground." However, everybody now knew of their existence, — half the problem of financial success solved — and, in the haste of sudden affliction, recalled the name.

Then, too, there were the little gifts — bookmarks, paper-cutters, paper-weights — which many of the physicians found on their desks; Christmas presents, New Year's Greetings, with "compliments of Daver & Co."

"Capital fellow, Daver!" And the doctor "remembered" Daver — "the next time." "People do lean so on the family doctor."

So Daver & Co. increased in favor and

prospered ; and still sturdy old Job Graves said, again and again, as he drove his plane, or plied his sandpaper, or wielded his shears, " A business that you can't push ! You can't push it, as you can other kinds of business."

Everybody knows that undertakers are hard-hearted, soulless. Just how everybody knows this is another question. It is a portion of that general fund of knowledge which is born with many people. Therefore Job was rarely asked for charity ; beggars paused not at his office ; tramps glanced at his sign and passed on. Even the children looked askance at him, when they learned his occupation.

Yes, it is a part of the Public's innate axiomatic knowledge, that undertakers have no feelings ; machines merely ; necessary evils. Job felt his alienation deeply ; felt it the more, since wife and children had gone away. The old-fashioned, sad-faced, silent man, in his rusty coat and high stock, went in and out among the homes of sorrow ; he heard sighs and moans, saw bitter tears

trickling, dropping ; but always for others, never a breath of sympathy for him. He moved, a white shadow, in darkened rooms, yet a shadow with a heart. Oh, his heart was hungry, often, for pity, for affection. He even envied, sometimes, the silent form in the coffin ; it at least had love rained upon it. Voices, which spoke to him in stern command, sobbed there ; faces, which turned to him in critical inquiry, grew distorted with anguish as they bent over that other face, scarcely whiter than his own.

Thus Job lived, and hungered, and was “in the world but not of the world.” His impassive worn old face told little of the need of his desolate heart. He accepted his destiny, which was, — “not to be ministered unto, but to minister.”

One early morning a drunken, dishevelled tramp found rear entrance to the “Coffin-Warerooms,” and lay, in a stupor, under a bench. Job’s assistant discovered him there. Perhaps this degraded human remnant, seeking such hospitality, lacked the knowledge

regarding undertakers so fully bestowed on men and women in general. The assistant pushed a bag of plush trimmings under his head. Job entered hastily, preparing to journey to a distant city, to bring back a "body" for burial. He glanced at the heavy besotted face, partly hidden by an unkempt beard, and said, "Let him sleep it off, here! Afterward give him food, and my old coat on that nail, there!" Then he hurried stiffly down the street, to his train.

The tramp did not "sleep it off." He had "slept off" too many such states before. He was a shattered wreck. There are two exits from stupor. One is back into this visible world, the other is forward into the Unseen. The latter was the shorter exit for the stertorous tramp, and tramps prefer short routes. So he took it.

"Poor devil!" said Job's assistant, and summoned the doctor and coroner; they tried pulse, opened eyelid, felt heart, voted the beast dead. Chuckled over his wisdom in selecting his lodging-house. Affirmed that

he had chosen his own undertaker; "the wishes of the dead should be respected;" then a loud laugh, and they departed. So "Daver, City Undertaker," lost this case.

Here was the ambitious assistant's opportunity. An assistant may not be trusted by a careful master to prepare "regular cases," but a tramp — It was a rare opportunity; the assistant washed, shaved, clothed, — in short, "laid out" the body.

When Job returned, that evening, the assistant met him at the door, told him the unexpected, and with pride led the way into the back-shop, to a painted pine coffin beside the bench. And Job Graves, undertaker, looked, then stared, then gasped, and then recognized — the dead face of his wayward son. Death had done its purifying work, as assistant or even master could never have done it; the coarse tramp-face had dissolved, vanished; the fine features of innocent, hopeful, eager youth lay there revealed. And as patient, wounded old Job felt this awful blow upon his tired heart, he looked about him

appealingly ; looked for some one to lean upon. There was nobody but the assistant and his hastily-offered arm. Not what the anguished man sought, but he accepted it ; then sank, drooping, upon a box ; and cold drops beaded his brow.

There he sat in silence, and the tall old-fashioned clock in the corner counted out the seconds, as a physician counts out the drops from a vial, at a bedside. Job heard them, and they seemed like years ; — his own weary years coming back to him out of the past. He realized now that he had been desperately holding a hope and a purpose in his heart ; realized now, by its absence, that it had been there, unnamed, unrecognized. He put his hand unconsciously to his side ; something seemed to be going ; the assistant saw that his lips were parted wide, and that he breathed in gasps ; but Job uttered no word, told nothing of the desolation that had come to him. Who was there to tell ? Who cared about an undertaker's grief ? That face ! O that poor white face of his boy !

There was a sermon, to which the old undertaker had listened, years before, which had many a time recurred to his thought ; it was a sermon on the prodigal son's return ; and in whatever way he had looked at the hard facts and faced the dark probabilities, that picture of a home-coming and forgiveness had pushed its way to the front. Often he had read the beautiful parable, going away alone and unperceived to do it ; and at those words "fell on his neck and kissed him," he always stopped, and repeated them slowly and softly, and a look of hungry longing came over his face, and the good book was slowly closed and laid away. There would be no more reading of that old story. Yesterday it held a gleam of light in its depths ; to-day the words were like loose formless ashes ; gray like his own face ; and he seemed to shrink and wither, as he sat tottering, one hand pressing his side, the other weakly supporting himself.

The next day Job did not appear at the office ; he was ill, in bed.

An undertaker, ill, is a strange sight ; seriously, dangerously ill ; he the only man who actually wars with death and gains even a partial victory. He surrenders, indeed, as all men do, but he seems to dictate terms of capitulation. Strange it is, then, to think upon the man who traffics confidently, controllingly, in caskets and coffins, when he views them from so weak a strategic position as a sick-bed. But the old formula of dialectics reads, "Man is mortal," — major premise ; and out of our dark sad experience we append the minor premise, "Undertakers are men." Then the conclusion is instant, inevitable.

A week later a physician stood by Job's bedside and told him that he had no ailment, and would be "out" in a few days. For answer Job looked calmly at him and said, "On your way to your office, call at my attorney's ! Send him here ! I wish to make my will !"

"But, my good man, there is really not the slightest —"

Job raised his white thin hand deprecatingly, closed his eyes, hesitated, then said, with an effort, "Please also send Daver to me! You know Daver? Does good work; has some new-fangled notions, but does good work."

Then Job turned his face to the wall. He knew his own condition. He was dying. We all begin to die at our birth; that is normal dying. Nature does it skilfully, inexorably, gently. Job Graves had been dying with abnormal rapidity for twenty years; dying of hunger, and solitary imprisonment for life; hunger for affection; solitary imprisonment within the gloomy walls of his strange vocation. Was this also Nature's doing? If not, whose?

Daver, mystified but smiling, prompt but constrained, came the next day. Job's lips moved a salutation, but no sound came. Daver waited. He was ill at ease. He was in an unaccustomed position. He often was called to dark rooms and sheeted beds, but with the conditions different. This sum-

mons was premature ; Daver was restless ; cleared his throat loudly, fingered his hat. "To be called here ! To this house, of all houses ! To this man, of all men !" Daver's ruling principle was to please ; always to gloss the painful stubborn fact ; but ruling principles may be suspended ; hearts, like states, may experience rebellion ; souls, like nations, may suffer revolution ; the governing power may be unseated.

So it was with Daver. In his accustomed groove, a "Funeral Director ;" outside that groove, a man ; and strange rills opened in his heart, unwonted vibrations tingled along his nerves. His round red face grew anxious, sad. A man's pity, tenderness, looked out through a "Funeral Director's " eyes, as they rested on that sick wan face.

The old undertaker's eyes opened slowly ; his gaze wandered restlessly about the bare room, then paused upon a crude crayon portrait of an old man, near the foot of the bed. The face resembled his own. Job's gaze clung to it tenderly, trustfully. Then his

gaze wandered, rested on the man beside his bed ; he started as if with surprise, but recollected. "Daver, I have sent for you, — you know why." He spoke feebly ; the other nodded, looking constrainedly into his filmy eyes.

"I wish I could take — this — old body — with me, or see to its burying, myself ; but I can't. We all have to ask help at last, Daver."

The plain direct appeal of the old man moved Daver strangely. He wondered at himself, as he sat there.

"We must depend on — on somebody else, Daver, when — when we are finally the 'case,' ourselves ; and assistants are not to be trusted, — not to be trusted." He raised his eyes, with inquiry, toward the crayon portrait ; then added, "Father never slighted his work." And a faint smile of content flickered over the dying man's face, saying what the humble man's lips would not utter, that he too had never slighted his work.

"Daver, neighbor," he murmured, putting

out his thin hand, seeking, in his last hours, after what he had vainly sought, for many lonely years, — a grasp of understanding and sympathy — “Daver, you — do — good — work ; but you — know — what — I would wish done. *My way, this time, Daver?* That — is — all.”

And the “Funeral Director’s” strong red hand closed over the “Undertaker’s” wasted white one, and the grasp was a pledge. A long silence. Then Daver departed, and Job rested peacefully.

Exactly when his last breath came, nobody in the house could say ; but it was about dawn, the next morning ; the weary spirit slipped away. Job Graves left earth, — an undertaker ; he entered heaven, — a man.

A few days later, a funeral procession passed along the street, between the two offices. It was “A funeral of Daver’s,” but it was “Job Graves’s funeral.” Throughout all the arrangements, the Old and the New in funereal art were strangely blended ; and a discerning Public felt injured, as it felt

baffled in its attempt at explanation. The door-knob of the "Coffin Warerooms" was hung with a knot of black crape, yet the hearse was from the "establishment of Daver & Co., City Undertakers," whose assistant acted as driver; the assistant from the "Coffin Warerooms" rode in the mourners' carriage; and, — strange to tell, — inexplicable to the wise, all-knowing Public, quite contrary to his custom, Daver, in his luxurious coupé, followed the few carriages, came last in the line.

DEATH and burial! Thus ends this little volume. Thus end all things earthly; yet we know that although

"Hearts are dust, hearts' loves remain;
Heart's love will meet thee again."

My aim has not been solely to amuse. Among the mingled smiles and tears, in which this book has been fashioned, I hope

that a few words have been dropped, which shall help reveal the nobler springs of human action, and strengthen the higher purposes of human hearts.

A clergyman's vocation, unlike all other vocations, draws upon a man's affections, without limit ; therein lies its peculiar blessedness. It calls upon a man to "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and to weep with them that weep." The lawyer sees many quarrels, and self-interest dictates a fomenting of those quarrels ; but a clergyman finds all his impulses, selfish and unselfish alike, pushing him to adjust differences, and to harmonize discords. Thus there comes, often, a sweetness into his life, which other men know but rarely. And, as his powers ripen, and his relations with his people deepen, his words gain in weight, and his counsel is more and more sought.

Always, to every true minister of Christ's gospel, there is a sense of unrealized ideals, as lustrous — but as remote — at seventy as at twenty. This keeps him humble, and makes

him patient with the failures of others ; so that his preaching, which began in oracular admonition, grows, with the years, into tender persuasion, and a confident faith in the diviner elements in all human hearts.





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